JUNJI ITO

THE LIMINAL ZONE

THE LIMINAL ZONE

JUNJI ITO

CONTENTS

Weeping Woman Way
—3—

Madonna
—67—

The Spirit Flow of Aokigahara
—127—

Slumber
—167—

AFTERWORD
—210—

WEEPING WOMAN WAY

...WHEN WE TRAVELED TO TOHOKU BEFORE OUR WEDDING.

MAKO ENDED UP IN A BIZARRE CONDITION BECAUSE OF WHAT HAPPENED LAST MONTH...

IT CAN BE FUN TO STOP SOME-WHERE ON A WHIM.

TOWARD THE END OF THE TRIP, WE GOT OFF AT A STATION ON THE LOCAL LINE.

MAKO.

YUZU-RU.

IT SURE IS.

NICE TO BE OUT IN THE COUNTRY, HM?

WHAT?

HM?

AAAAAAA

HUH?

SOMEONE'S CRYING... CAN'T YOU HEAR IT?

AAAAAAAAAA

IT'S COMING FROM THAT HOUSE.

SOB SOB SOB SOB

YOU'RE RIGHT. SOUNDS LIKE A WOMAN.

DOESN'T SOUND LIKE NORMAL CRYING, EITHER.

SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB

AAAAA

SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB

*SIGN: IN MOURNING

HUH... SO IT'S A FUNERAL.

AAAA

忌中

AAAA

AAAAAAAA

忌中

AAAAAAAAAA

SHE MUST HAVE REALLY LOVED THEM.

EVEN SO, SHE SEEMS EXTRA SAD.

SOB SOB
SOB SOB

AAA

SHE'S A *WEEPING WOMAN.*

I HAVEN'T SEEN ONE IN A WHILE MYSELF.

THEY'VE GONE OUT OF FASHION.

ARE YOU TRAVELERS? I GUESS YOU WOULDN'T KNOW THIS CUSTOM.

MM-HMM.

A WEEPING... WOMAN?

AAAA

IT WAS THE ULTIMATE SERVICE FOR THE DEAD.

SOB SOB SOB SOB

BACK IN THE DAY, PEOPLE USED TO ALWAYS CALL ONE TO FUNERALS.

THEY KNOW REAL SADNESS. THEY COULDN'T BE WEEPERS IF THEY DIDN'T.

THE WEEPING WOMEN AROUND HERE ARE NO FAKERS.

SHE IS REALLY CRYING.

SO THAT'S A JOB... BUT IT LOOKS LIKE SHE'S REALLY CRYING.

H-HEY. MAKO...

AAAAAH!

SOB SOB SOB

SORRY... I WAS JUST SUDDENLY SO SAD.

YOU SURPRISED ME BACK THERE. I KNOW OTHER PEOPLE CRYING MAKES YOU CRY, BUT STILL.

UH-HUH.

ALL DONE CRYING ?

SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB

SOB SOB

SOB SOB SOB SOB

SOB SOB SOB

IT'S THAT WEEPING WOMAN.

OH!

SOB SOB

SOB SOB SOB

SOB

SOB

...SHE NEVER STOPPED CRYING.

IN FACT...

THAT WAS WHEN MAKO STARTED ACTING WEIRD.

AFTER WE GOT BACK FROM THE TRIP, SHE WOULD BURST INTO TEARS AT THE SMALLEST THINGS.

BUT ISN'T THIS A BIT MUCH?

I MEAN, I KNOW YOU FELT FOR THE WEEPING WOMAN.

MAKO. WHY ARE YOU CONSTANTLY CRYING?

I'M... I'M SO SAD.

YUZURU, IT'S JUST...

PRE-WEDDING JITTERS ...

...

BUT WHAT IS IT THAT'S SO SAD?

I DON'T KNOW. BUT I'M SAD.

SOB SOB SOB

SOB SOB

MAYBE THAT WAS IT.

MAYBE THE WEEPING WOMAN WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A CATALYST.

MAYBE WE SHOULD CALL OFF THE ENGAGEMENT FOR NOW.

NO... IT'S NOT THAT.

MAKO, ARE YOU UNHAPPY WITH ME?

I DON'T KNOW IF WE CAN LIVE TOGETHER LIKE THIS.

IT'S WEIRD, THOUGH. I MEAN, CRYING FOR NO REASON.

SOB SOB

AAAH!

UNH... WAAAH!

THE NEXT MORNING ...

WAAAH!

AAAAH!

SO PLEASE DON'T CRY.

NO, NO! I'D NEVER LEAVE YOU, MAKO.

SOB SOB

M-MAKO.

I'M COLD!

HM?

YAZK

THE BED'S SOAKED!

W-WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO ME?

UNH ...

AND THE ANTIDE-PRESSANT THEY PRE-SCRIBED DIDN'T WORK AT ALL.

BUT WHEN I TOOK HER TO THE HOSPITAL, THEY COULDN'T FIND ANYTHING.

I THOUGHT THAT MAYBE IT WAS SOME KIND OF WEIRD DISEASE.

OYAMA GENERAL HOSPITAL

FORTUNE-TELLING?

PALM FACE

DESTINY APPRAISAL
LOVE/MARRIAGE
WORK/FINANCES

FACE & PALM READING

THE KEY IS IN TOHOKU!

HMPH !!

SNAP

WE WERE GRASPING AT STRAWS.

TRUE, IF THIS WAS CAUSED BY THAT TRIP, THEN MAYBE THE SOLUTION WAS THERE, TOO.

TOHOKU ...

ANYWAY.

WE HAVE TO FIND THAT WEEPING WOMAN.

WEEPING WOMAN?

EH?

NO IDEA.

HMM.

WE FIRST WENT TO THE HOUSE WHERE THE FUNERAL HAD BEEN HELD.

...OF WEEPING WOMEN DIED OUT WAY BACK WHEN.

THE TRADITION ...

BUT ...

WHAT ?

BUT WE DIDN'T INVITE A WEEPING WOMAN.

WE DID HAVE THE FUNERAL HERE.

MAYBE SHE WAS A FOX SPIRIT PLAYING TRICKS.

WHAT'S GOING ON? EVERYONE IN TOWN SAYS THEY HAVE NO IDEA WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.

...

YUZURU.

MAKO.

SOB SOB SOB

SOB SOB

I FEEL LIKE CRYING, TOO.

MAKO ...

AAAAA

AH!

SOB SOB SOB SOB
SOB SOB SOB

AAA
AAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAA

AA
AA
AA

THAT WAILING ...

WHO KNOWS HOW FAR WE WALKED.

WE KEPT WALKING IN THE DIRECTION OF THE CRYING.

SOB SOB SOB SOB

HM?

MOSQUI-TOES ...?

AH!

WAS THAT REAL?

AAAAAAAAAA SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB

AH!

泪坂

泣女

泣女

泣女

AAAAAAAAAA

YOUNG WEEPING WOMAN WEEPING OLD WOMAN WEEPING MIDDLE-AGED ROAD TEARS WAILING ETC.

泣女

泣女

泣女

泣女

AAAAAA

A TOWN ALL THE WAY OUT HERE?

泣女

泣女

SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB

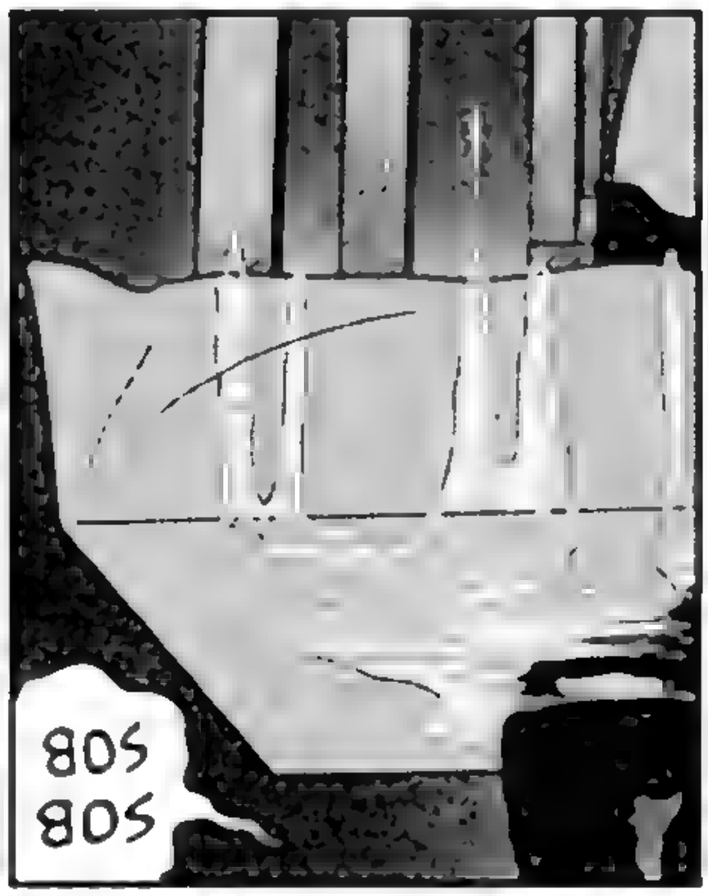
ααααα

働哭

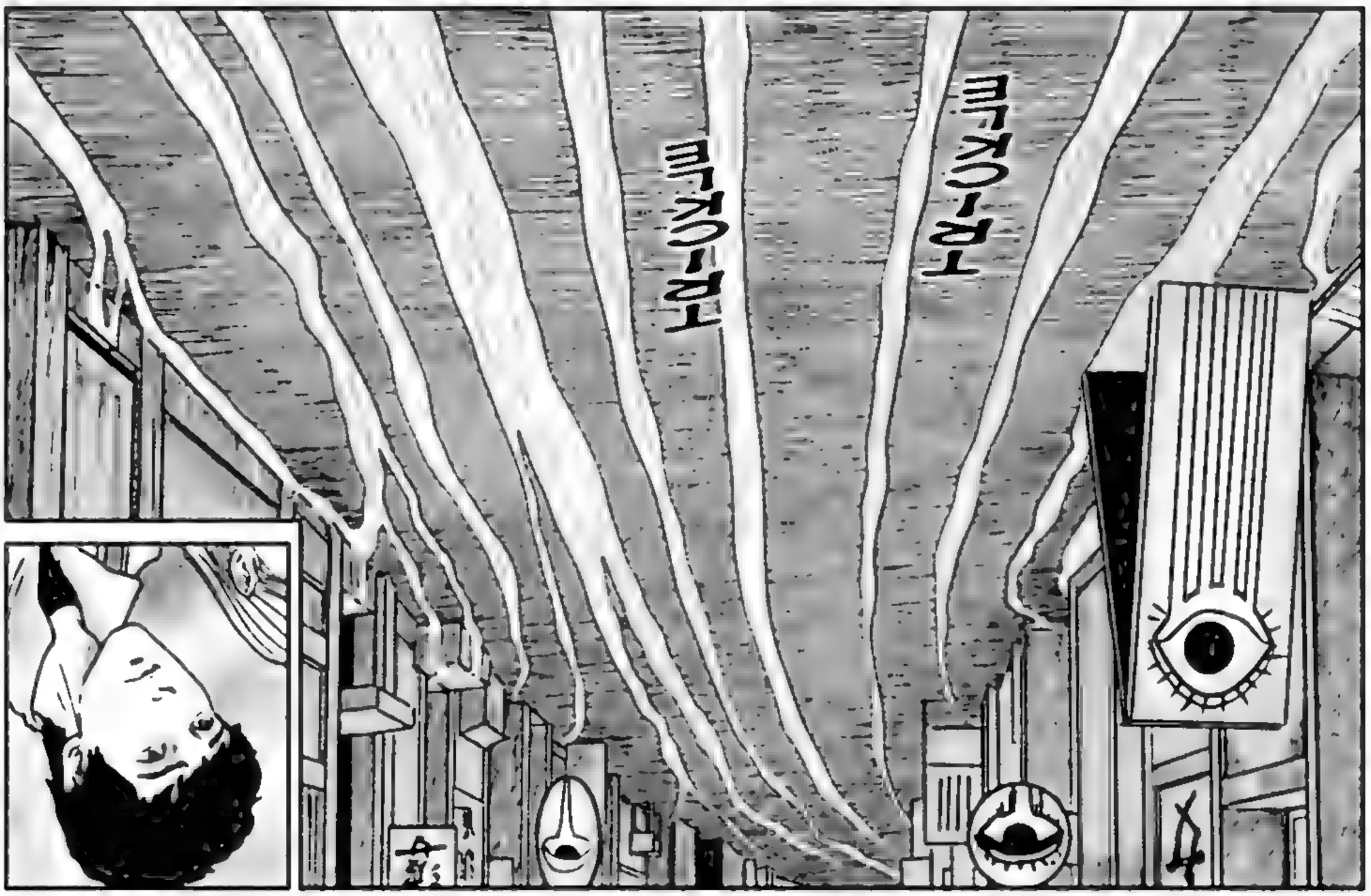
泣

SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB

AAAA


SOS
SOS

AAAAAAAAA
NOW NOW NOW


TRIUMPH
TRIUMPH

AA
SOB SOB
AAAAA
AAAAAA
AAA
WAA-AAH
泣女
THANK YOU SO MUCH.

THIS PLACE?

...

WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

EXCUSE ME.

HELLO.

H—

泣女

THE ONE IN THERE IS ESPECIALLY POWERFUL.

THIS IS WEEPING WOMAN WAY.

IT'S WHERE WE REMEMBER THE DEAD AND THE WEEPING WOMEN CRY FOR THEM.

...

EXCUSE ME.

涙道

I THINK THE DECEASED IS AT PEACE NOW.

泣く

I REMEMBER YOU FROM THE FUNERAL.

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.

IT'S YOU.

OH!

PLP PLP

YES...

YOU'VE CRIED A GREAT DEAL, *HM?*

I ESPECIALLY WANTED TO SEE *YOU* AGAIN.

IT IS A FUNDAMENTAL SADNESS.

YOU KNOW TRUE SADNESS.

PEOPLE LIKE YOU ARE RARE.

SOB SOB

SOB

BUT IT BECOMES VISIBLE TO THEM WHEN THEIR SPIRIT LEAVES THEIR FLESH.

YES... PEOPLE KNOW TRUE SADNESS WHEN THEY DIE.

THE AVERAGE PERSON CAN'T SEE THE FUNDAMENTAL SADNESS OF THIS WORLD.

JUST AS OUR TEARS ARE.

AND THE AMOUNT IS PROPORTIONAL TO THE NUMBER OF DEAD.

YOU UNDER-STAND THAT SADNESS.

THE TEARS THAT POUR FROM YOUR EYES ARE THOSE OF THE DEAD.

I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYONE SHED AS MANY TEARS AS YOU.

SO YOU ARE CALLED MAKO, THEN?

...THE GREATER THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE SHE HELPS REST IN PEACE.

THE MORE TEARS A WEEPING WOMAN SHEDS...

MAKO ...

AAAH ...

ORUI ...?

YES.

...EVEN BEST ORUI.

YOU MIGHT...

...HERE IN WEEPING WOMAN WAY 200 YEARS AGO.

ORUI IS THE LEGENDARY WEEPING WOMAN WHO MADE A NAME FOR HERSELF...

ALL ALONE, ORUI SHED TEARS OF GRIEF AND SADNESS.

THERE WAS A DROUGHT AT THE TIME, WHICH LED TO FAMINE, AND MANY OF THOSE AROUND HER DIED.

THEY SAY HER SOBS SPILLED OVER TO BECOME A LAKE AND WET THE THROATS OF THE PEOPLE.

THE TEARS THAT FLOWED CEASELESSLY FROM HER EYES MOISTENED THE EARTH, AND THE FIELDS WERE FRUITFUL AGAIN.

PLEASE FOLLOW ME.

I'D LIKE TO SHOW YOU SOME-THING.

RUI SWAMP OUT THERE IS WHAT REMAINS OF THE LAKE OF HER TEARS.

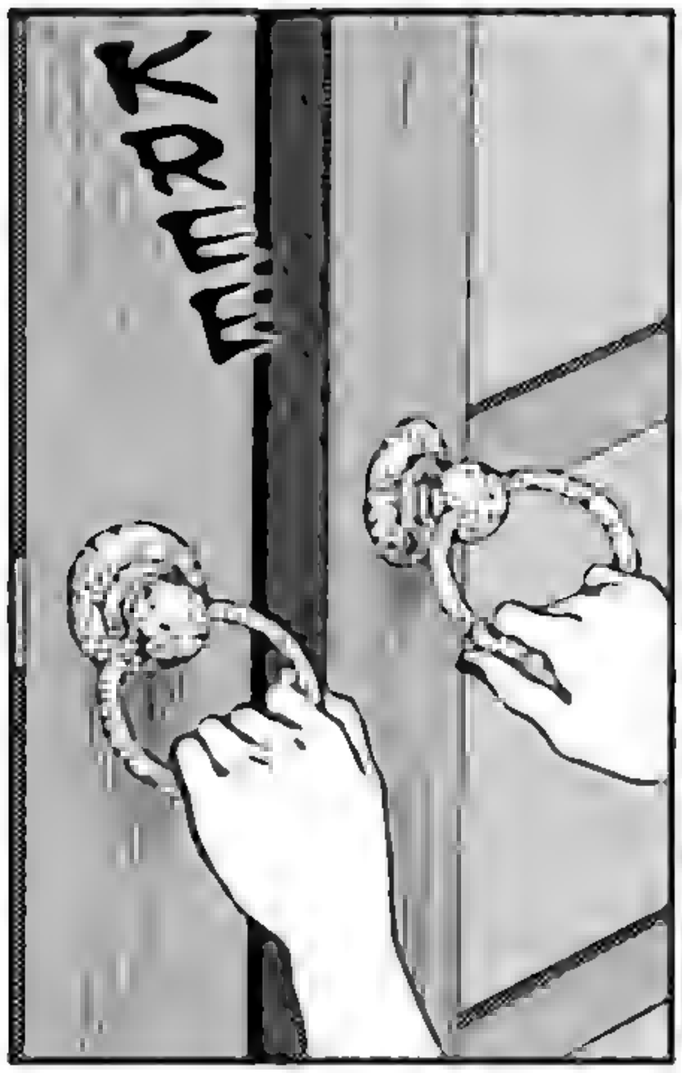
MY, THAT GIRL.

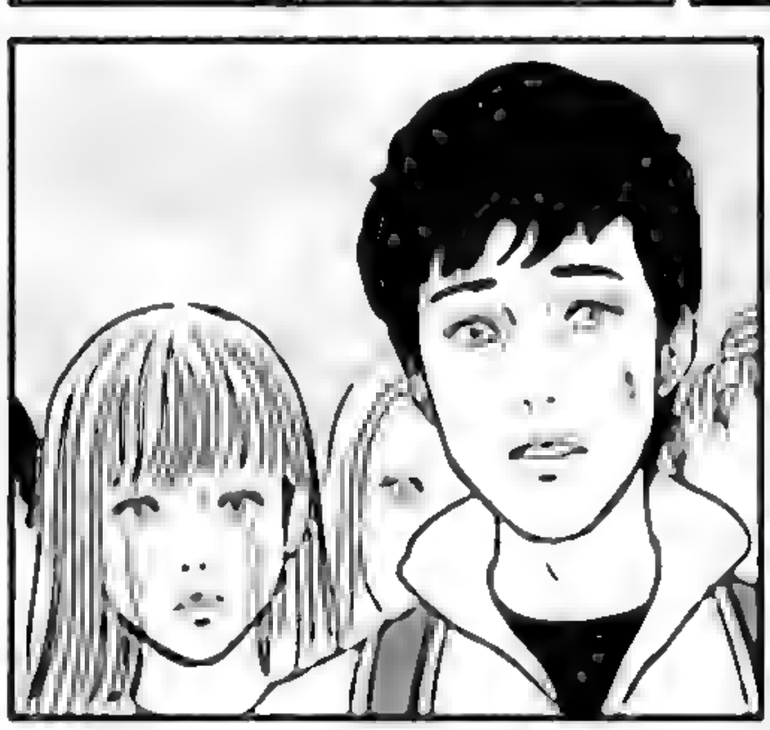
WHERE? LET ME SEE.

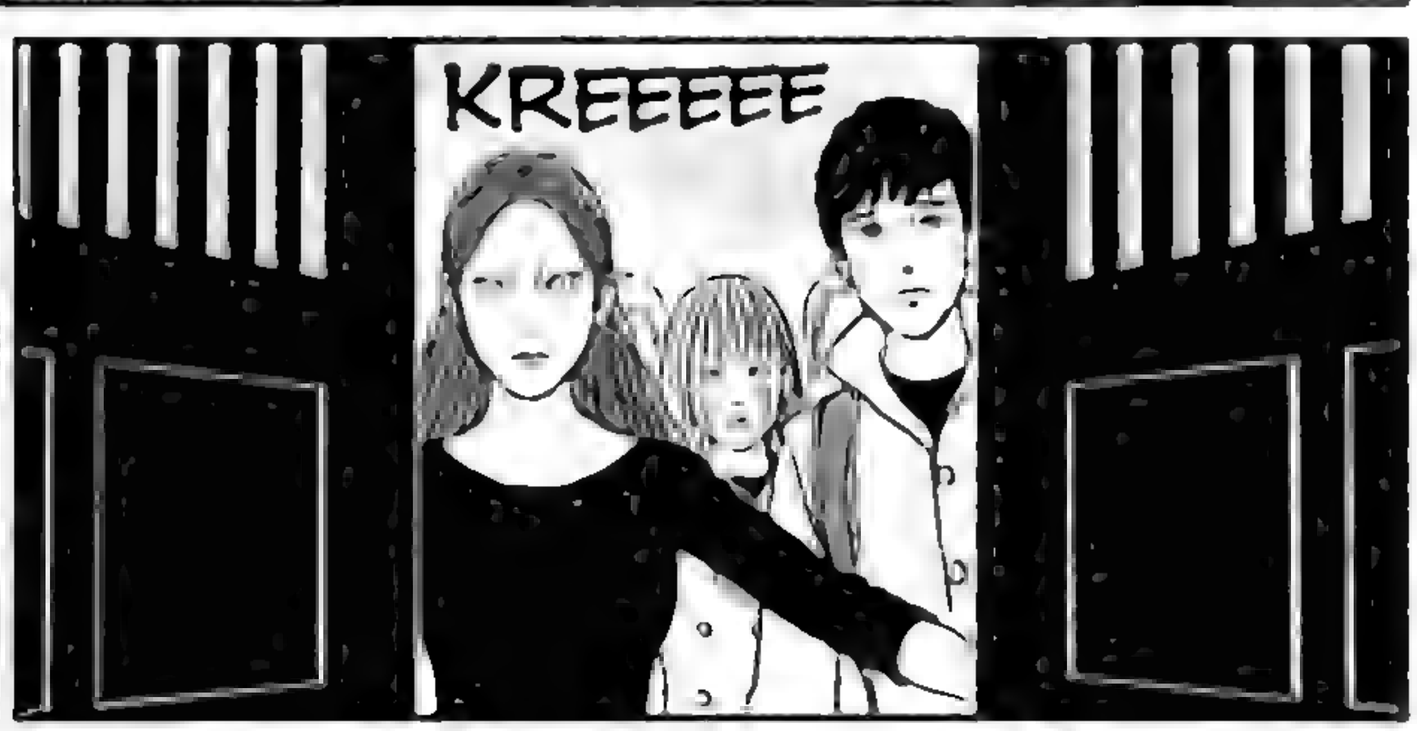
HAS SHE BEEN REBORN?

WHAT? LADY ORUI?

泣女


KREIK




KREEEEE

SOB SOB SOB SOB

...ORUI'S REMAINS.

THESE ARE...

NGH!

FLOWING DOWN HER CHEEKS HAVE BEEN THE TEARS OF THE INNUMERABLE DEAD WHO HAVE DEPARTED THIS WORLD.

HER FACE IS CAVING IN BECAUSE SHE HAS CONTINUED TO CRY OVER THE 200 YEARS SINCE HER DEATH.

...THERE ARE THAT MANY MORE DEAD UNABLE TO FIND PEACE.

BUT THE FACT THAT HER TEARS HAVE STOPPED MEANS...

AND INDEED, ALL THINGS MUST END.

BUT IN RECENT YEARS, THOSE TEARS SLOWED...

...UNTIL THEY FINALLY DRIED UP LAST YEAR.

...MANY SPIRITS HAVE LINGERED IN THIS AREA, UNABLE TO MOVE ON.

SINCE SHE STOPPED CRYING...

WE WORKED HARD TO TRY AND KEEP ORUI'S TEARS FLOWING, IN VAIN.

WE COULD DO NOTHING WITH OUR LIMITED POWER.

IF RUI SWAMP DRIES UP...

...WHO KNOWS WHAT SPIRITUAL OBSTACLES WILL ARISE?

HANG ON A MINUTE.

WAIT.

BUT MAKO... YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO DO IT.

YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO RENEW ORUI'S TEARS.

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS WEEP BEFORE ORUI.

PLEASE CRY. ALONG WITH US.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

SOB...

MAKO!

ALL RIGHT.

BAM

SOB

AAAAH.

SOB
SOB
SOB

SOB
SOB
SOB

SOB
SOB

SOB
SOB

AAAAH!

AAAAH!

SOB SOB

UNH ...

AAAAAH!

AAAH!

AAAAAAAAAH!

PSSSSH

?!

SPLSSH

PSSSH

LADY ORUI'S TEARS!

AAH!

PSSSH

PRAISE BE!
PRAISE BE!

THE DEAD ARE FINDING PEACE.

OH!

...

!
WOB
WOB
WOB
TH-
THIS
IS...

AAAAAAAAAAAA

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
PUSH
PUSH
KREE KREE KREE
KREE KREE KREE

CRACK

AAAA

AAAAAAAAAAA

YANK

MAKO!

WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE.

LADY ORUI'S COME BACK TO LIFE!

SHE'S COME BACK.

AAAAAAAAAA

!

DAM-MIT!

KLAK KLAK

COME BACK TO LIFE, I MEAN, COME ON! HER BACK JUST SWELLED UP FROM THE MOISTURE OF THE TEARS AND FORCED HER UP!

KLAK KLAK

AAAAAAAAAA

AAAAAAAA

KLAK KLAK

MAKE LADY ORUI CRY EVEN MORE!

YOU! KEEP CRYING HERE!

WAIT! DON'T GO!

LET GO!

AAAAAAA

DON'T BE RIDICU-LOUS!

I'M GOING TO BE A WEEPING WOMAN.

YU-ZURU... I'M STAY-ING.

AA

AA

AA

AA

AA

CRUMBLE

...

L-LADY ORUI...

LADY ORUI!

N-NOOO!

...DO NOW?

WHAT WILL WE...

...MUST STAY HERE.

YOU TRULY...

...

CHAK

KLAK KLAK

COME ON!

BA NG

AH!

WHOA!

DON'T GO!

PLEASE! WAIT!

WE'RE BEGGING YOU!

YOU HAVE TO BECOME A WEEPING WOMAN!

COME ON, MAKO!

THD

L-LET GO!

EEE!

THD

立

SOB SOB SOB

SOB SOB SOB

...WEEPING WOMAN WAY, I COULDN'T EVEN FIND MENTION OF WEEPING WOMEN.

STRANGELY, WHEN I SEARCHED ONLINE, NOT ONLY DID I NOT FIND...

I DON'T REMEMBER HOW MAKO AND I GOT HOME.

BUT SOME-HOW, WE MADE IT BACK.

I'M SO SAD.

SO SAD.

PUSH PUSH

THEY KEPT SPILLING OUT OF HER EYES.

SOB

SOB

BUT MAKO'S TEARS DIDN'T STOP.

SURPRISED AT HER CONDITION, HER FATHER AND AUNT...

...CAME TO TAKE HER.

SHE GREW WEAKER BY THE DAY.

THE CONSTANT CRYING EXHAUSTED HER.

YUZURU. FOR THE TIME BEING, THE ENGAGEMENT IS OFF.

GOOD-BYE.

WHY IS MAKO CRYING SO MUCH, YUZURU?

I TOLD THEM ABOUT THE WEEPING WOMEN, BUT THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE ME.

I WAS ALLOWED TO PAY MY RESPECTS.

PEACE

...MAKO DIED THREE MONTHS LATER.

WEAKENED FROM THE CONSTANT CRYING...

IS SHE MAYBE STILL ALIVE...?

...HER TEARS KEEP COMING.

BUT SHE'S COLD. HER EYES ARE SO SWOLLEN.

YUZURU... WHAT ON EARTH IS THIS?

MAKO'S DEAD, AND YET...

THERE'S NO WAY YOU WOULD HAVE MADE MAKO CRY.

YUZURU, I'M SORRY FOR DOUBTING YOU.

HER ENGAGEMENT TO YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE ONLY TIME SHE WAS HAPPY.

WE HAD OUR ISSUES AS A FAMILY. I CAUSED MAKO SO MUCH PAIN OVER HER LIFE.

I WAS A TERRIBLE FATHER.

DONG DONG DONG DONG DONG DONG DONG

WE NEED TO REPLACE THEM.

AAH. THE TOWELS ARE ALREADY SOAKED.

DONG DONG DONG

SHIN MU KEI GE MU KEI GE KO MU YU KU ON RI ISSAI TEN DO MU SO.

MU KU SHU METSU DO MU CHI YAKU MU TOKU I MU SHO TOK'KO.

DONG DONG DONG

SOB SOB

SOB SOB

SOB SOB

SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB

SOB SOB

SOB

AAAA

AAAAAAA

...

SOBB SOBB SOBB SOBB

SOBB SOBB SOBB SOBB

AAA

AAA

SOB SOB

SOB SOB SOB SOB SOB

SOB SOB SOB

AAAAAA

AAAAA

AAAAAAA

AAAAAA

AAAAAAA

W-WHAT IS GOING ON?!

!!

PSSH

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

AH!

PSSS

WHAT'S HAPPENING ?!

WHAT? HOW IS—?!

KLAK KLAK KLAK

PSSSSH

KLAK KLAK KLAK

AAAH !!

M-
MAKO
...

SOB SOB SOB

PLP
PLP
PLP
PLP
PLP

AAAAAA

AAAAA

AAAAAAA

PSSSH

AH!

AAAH!

EEEEE!

EEAAH!!

THE BODY IS—!!

I JUST KNOW THAT THE WEEPING WOMEN RAN OFF WITH HER.

IN ALL THE CONFUSION, MAKO'S BODY DISAPPEARED.

I'M SO HAPPY... IT'S THE SECOND COMING OF LADY ORUI.

SO VERY MANY TEARS.

EITHER WAY, SHE WAS NO DOUBT AT WEEPING WOMAN WAY.

哭

涙道

涙道

泣女

WAS SHE ALIVE? OR WAS IT HER CORPSE THAT WAS CRYING?

...I STILL HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO FIND THE PLACE AGAIN.

BUT ...

I SOMETIMES TRAVEL TO TOHOKU EVEN NOW.

MADONNA

...ON BEHALF OF THE ACADEMY, I, YUKIRO TENJO, BOARD CHAIR AND PRINCIPAL...

FOR THE FACT THAT YOU HAVE BROUGHT US GLORY AND PROSPERITY SINCE THE FOUNDING OF TENSEI ACADEMY...

WE OFFER UP OUR MONTHLY PRAYERS OF GRATITUDE.

OUR LORD IN HEAVEN.

GLARE

...MOST SINCERE GRATITUDE.

...OFFER UP OUR...

...

HEY, MARIA?
LIKE, MAYBE HE LIKES YOU?
I THINK THE PRINCIPAL'S STARING AT YOU!
WHAT, RISA?

IT'S BEEN A MONTH SINCE I TRANSFERRED TO TENSEI ACADEMY.

TENSEI ACADEMY

IT WAS A MISSIONARY GIRLS' BOARDING SCHOOL, AND THE RULES WERE EVEN STRICTER THAN I'D HEARD.

NO WAY. I MEAN, I DO FEEL HIS EYES ON ME.

THAT WOULD JUST BE CREEPY, BUT...

...I'M MORE CURIOUS ABOUT HIS WIFE.

THE CAMPUS WAS SURROUNDED BY A TALL WALL, AND YOU NEEDED PERMISSION TO CONTACT THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

IN PARTICULAR, THE VICE CHAIR, WHO WAS ALSO THE PRINCIPAL'S WIFE, WAS REMARKABLY STRICT.

SHE'S SO PRETTY. LIKE A REAL-LIFE MADONNA.

THAT'S THE NEW TRANSFER STUDENT, MARIA AMANO.

MARIA, YOU CAN'T SAY THAT SO LOUDLY.

SHH!

THE PRINCIPAL'S WIFE IS SUPER INTIMIDATING, THOUGH.

AAAH, THE WEEKLY PRAYER'S FINALLY OVER.

...THE CHARACTERS MEANING "ANGRY WITCH WOMAN."

WE CALL HER THAT, TOO, BUT WE SPELL IT WITH...

AND SHE THINKS SHE'S THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY. SHE MAKES HIM CALL HER MADONNA.

SHE'S THE ONE WHO'S ACTUALLY IN CHARGE. I HEARD THE PRINCIPAL DOESN'T DARE GO AGAINST HER.

...MADONNA!

TAK TAK TAK

SPEAK OF THE WITCH...

TAK TAK TAK TAK

AH!

TAK TAK TAK

*MADONNA: 魔怒女(マドンナ) = 魔(EVIL) 怒(ANGRY) 女(WOMAN)

AH!

YOU TWO!

TAK

...DURING CHAPEL, WEREN'T YOU?!

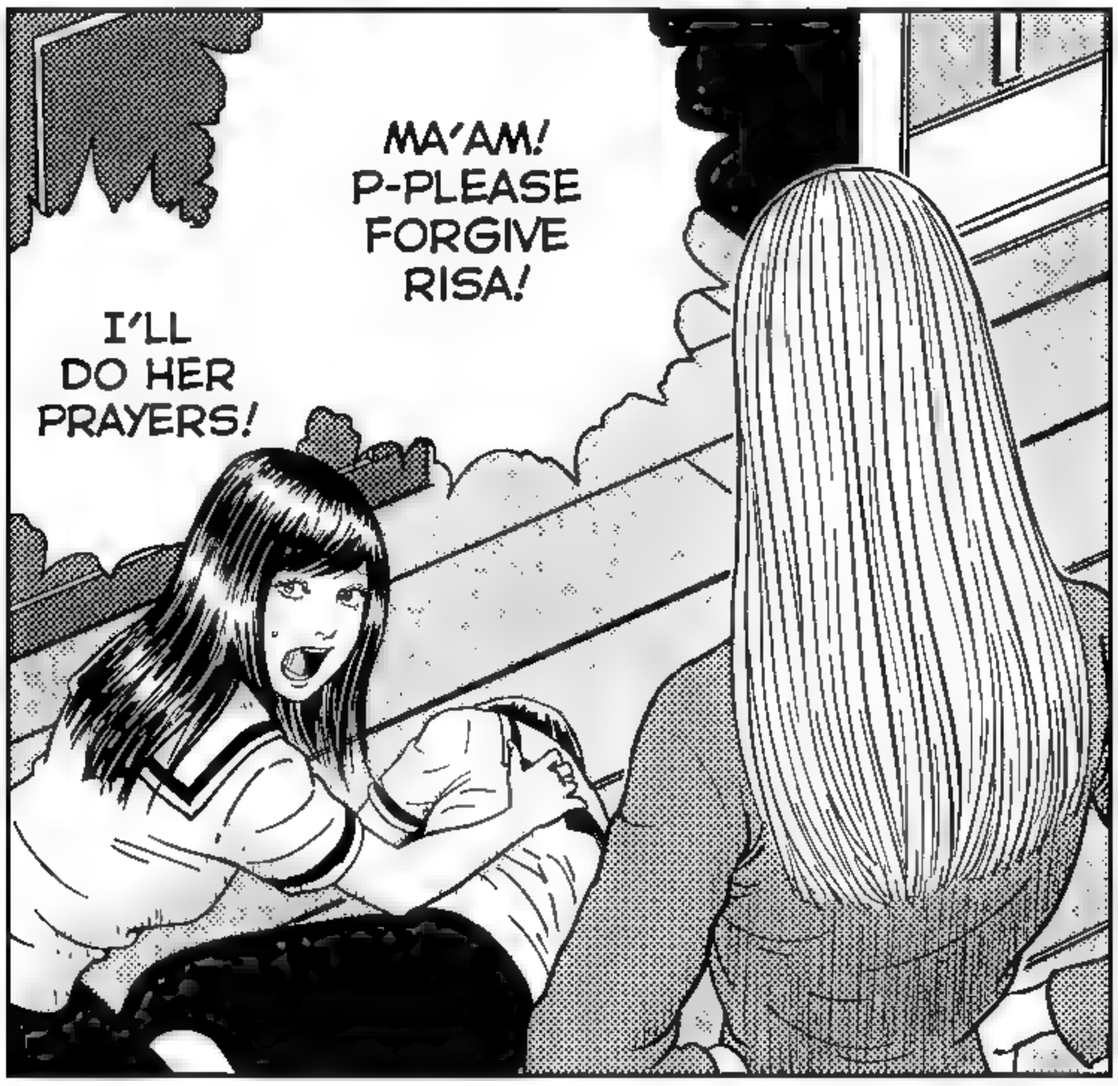
YOU WERE WHISPER-ING...

!

AS PUNISHMENT, YOU WILL KNEEL BEFORE THE CROSS FOR TWO HOURS!

SUCH DISRESPECT FOR OUR SACRED PRAYERS!

I CAN'T ANY-MORE ...
MARIA ...


MA'AM! P-PLEASE FORGIVE RISA!
I'LL DO HER PRAYERS!

RISA!
THUD

SUCH A TREMEN-DOUS NAME!
MARIA!

MARIA AMANO.

ADMIRABLE SPIRIT.
WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

YEAH.

RISA... YOU OKAY?

I COULDN'T MOVE, ALL DEER-IN-THE-HEADLIGHTS.

I WAS SHAKING WHEN SHE YELLED AT US.

I WAS SO SCARED.

LIKE IT WAS BEING SQUEEZED IN A VISE...

MY HEAD JUST STARTED HURTING LIKE CRAZY ALL OF A SUDDEN.

AND THEN SHE STARTED TO CHANGE.

BUT YOU KNOW, I HEAR SHE DIDN'T USED TO BE LIKE THAT.

SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL AND KIND BACK WHEN SHE MARRIED THE PRINCIPAL.

YEAH. SHE REALLY IS AN ANGRY WITCH WOMAN.

RUMOR HAS IT THE PRINCIPAL CHEATED ON HER, AND HER ANGER TURNED HER FROM THE MADONNA INTO THE ANGRY WITCH WOMAN...

SHE REALLY WAS LIKE THE MADONNA.

SHE RULES THIS SCHOOL WITH TERROR.

WOW.

THE BIBLE STUDIES TEACHER, SATOMI KIYOKAWA.

SHE'S SO BEAUTIFUL THAT SOME GIRLS SECRETLY CALL HER MISS MADONNA.

HE EVEN HAD A LOVER HERE AT SCHOOL.

WHAT, FOR REAL?! WHO?

HIS FIRST WIFE WENT MISSING, AND SHE ENDED UP MARRYING HIM.

WHAT ?!

BUT, YOU KNOW, THE WITCH WOMAN USED TO BE THE PRINCIPAL'S LOVER, TOO.

OH, SORRY. YOU REST, RISA.

I'M GOING TO BED.

AAAH, MARIA... I FEEL SO OUT OF IT.

HM?

TENSEI ACADEMY
B-NG
BONG
...
TCK
TCK
ARE THEY SOME KIND OF ART THING?
THERE ARE ALL THESE WEIRD-SHAPED STONES ON THE SCHOOL GROUNDS.

REAL SALTY.

IT'S SALTY.

ISN'T IT GROSS LICKING THAT ROCK?

ERR ...

ACTUALLY, NOT JUST STUDENTS. TEACHERS, TOO.

NOW THAT I'M THINKING ABOUT IT, THERE ARE SOME WEIRD STUDENTS AT THIS SCHOOL.

MAYBE IT'S ROCK SALT?

SALTY?

AMANO!

YES?

THAT'S ALL FOR TODAY. EVERYONE, HURRY BACK TO THE DORMS.

YEAR 1 CLASS B

BONG BONG

A FEW DAYS LATER ...

WHISPER
THE PRINCI-PAL!
WHISPER
...
WHISPER
WHISPER
HUH?
THE PRINCIPAL WANTS TO SEE YOU. GO TO HIS OFFICE STRAIGHT-AWAY.
PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE
WHAT COULD THE PRINCIPAL WANT WITH ME?
...
...SHOW YOU AROUND, SINCE YOU JUST TRANSFERRED IN.
I THOUGHT I'D...
THANKS FOR COMING.
MARIA AMANO.

SO OUR ACADEMY HAS A STRONG CONNECTION TO THE WORLD OF POLITICS.

NZO OIKE

7TH VICE CHAIR KONOSUKE YONETAMA

MAKOTO SATOYAMA

IT'S NOT SIMPLY GOD'S GRACE THAT HAS LED TO OUR ACADEMY'S CURRENT PROSPERITY.

THESE PHOTOS ARE OF THE PREVIOUS BOARD MEMBERS OF OUR PEDIGREED ACADEMY.

SOME EVEN WENT ON TO BECOME IMPORTANT POLITICIANS LATER.

SHE USED TO BE VERY BEAUTIFUL ...

...AND SO KIND.

FROM 20 YEARS AGO. SHE LOOKS QUITE DIFFERENT NOW.

OH, THIS IS MY WIFE.

8TH VICE CHAIR MISUZU TENJO

...

THERE'S NO HINT OF THAT KINDNESS NOW.

CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT?

8TH VICE CHAIR MISUZU TENJO

SHE WAS ALSO SO BEAUTIFUL THAT THEY CALLED HER THE MADONNA OF THE ACADEMY BACK IN THE DAY.

BUT SHE WAS MUCH MORE STRICT.

7TH VICE CHAIR HARUYO TENJO

AND THIS IS MY FIRST WIFE.

7TH VICE CHAIR HARUYO TENJO

SASUKE TAKENAKA

AND NEXT TO HER IS OUR SON, KIRIHITO.

MISUZU RAISED HIM AFTER HIS MOTHER DISAPPEARED.

BOARD KIRIHITO TENJO

SHE WAS ALWAYS SO SALTY WITH ME.

SO I SECRETLY CALLED HER "SALT WOMAN." HEH HEH HEH.

HE WAS ALSO APPOINTED TO THE BOARD.

BUT HE AND HIS STEPMOTHER HAD A FALLING-OUT, AND HE LEFT THREE YEARS AGO. NO IDEA WHERE HE IS NOW.

WE HOLD SERVICES THERE THAT ONLY THE VERY SPECIAL ARE ALLOWED TO TAKE PART IN.

HOW ABOUT YOU OBSERVE THEM TONIGHT?

THERE IS A SMALL CHURCH ON THE CAMPUS.

Y-YES?

BY THE WAY, MARIA.

THAT'S AN ORDER FROM THE PRINCIPAL.

HEH HEH HEH.

WHAT? BUT...

...ETER-
NALLY.

WE WILL
WORSHIP
YOU...

SHE
OF THE
DEEPEST
MERCY.

OUR HOLY
MOTHER
IN HEAVEN
AVE
MARIA.

AMEN.

PLEASE
FORGIVE
US OUR
SINS.

YOU GAVE
BIRTH TO
OUR LORD
AND THUS
ARE THE
CENTER
OF THE
UNIVERSE.

PLEASE FORGIVE ME.

BLESSED MARY... PLEASE FORGIVE MY SINS.

EVERYONE'S REALLY AFRAID...

IT'S LIKE THEY'RE WORSHIPPING MARY AS A GOD. BUT I'M PRETTY SURE SHE WASN'T.

AND THIS SERVICE... SOMETHING'S WEIRD ABOUT IT.

LIKE SHE'S THE BLESSED VIRGIN HERSELF.

PLUS, THE VICE CHAIR ACTING LIKE THAT.

AND THE STATUE OF MARY'S CREEPY, TOO.

IS THAT RED STUFF... BLOOD?

YES ...

Y...

SHAKE SHAKE

IT'S YOUR TURN, AKEMI.

SHAKE SHAKE

...DO YOU HESITATE?

WHY ...

...

I BEG FORGIVE-NESS!

SHAKE SHAKE

B-BLESSED MARY...

BUT TO BE THAT AFRAID...

SHE WAS LICKING THE ROCK.

AND NOW SHE'S HERE TOO.

TH- THAT GIRL.

SHAKE

SHAKE

OH! IT WAS VERY INTERESTING.

HOW DID YOU LIKE THE SPECIAL SERVICE, MARIA?

PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

...ARE ADMITTED TO THE SPECIAL CLASS— ONLY THOSE QUALIFIED TO SERVE THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

ONLY THOSE WITH DEEP FAITH, EXCELLENT GRADES, AND BEAUTIFUL FEATURES...

YES.

YOU'RE YEAR ONE IN THE REGULAR PROGRAM, YES?

SPECIAL CLASS ?!

I'D LIKE TO RECOMMEND YOU FOR THE SPECIAL CLASS.

AND I WAS FINALLY MAKING FRIENDS. NOW I HAVE TO START ALL OVER.

I HAVE TO CHANGE DORMS, TOO.

HE BASICALLY FORCED ME TO SWITCH TO THE SPECIAL CLASS.

LET ME INTRO-DUCE YOU.

THIS IS YOUR ROOM.

OH...

SHE'S ALSO IN CHARGE OF THE DORM.

THIS IS SATOMI KIYOKAWA, HEAD OF THE SPECIAL CLASS.

I'LL SHOW YOU AROUND.

MARIA AMANO, YES?

OH!

...YOUR ROOM-MATE, AKEMI SAYAKO.

THIS IS...

NICE TO MEET YOU.

AKEMI... MY NAME'S MARIA AMANO.

I'LL FIX THEM FOR YOU.

YOUR BRAIDS ARE COMING LOOSE.

UM.

AKEMI ?

OH! AKEMI, THERE'S ...

...WHITE STUFF IN YOUR EAR.

PATTA

PATTA

PATTA

PATTA

SALTY.

LICK

HEY, AKEMI? I'LL CLEAN YOUR EARS FOR YOU. LIE DOWN.

PATTA PATTA

THE SAME STUFF CAME OUT OF RISA'S EAR...

HUH?

SALT?

YOU REALLY ARE THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

BLESSED MARIA.

I AM NOT. DON'T SAY THAT IN FRONT OF ANYONE.

HOLY MARIA.

YOU'RE SO NICE, MARIA.

IT'S WEIRD THAT SALT WOULD BUILD UP IN HERE.

THE INSIDE'S SO DARK, I CAN'T SEE ANYTHING.

SHAKE SHAKE SHAKE

AKEMI!

?!

OH! SPEAKING OF THE MADONNA, WHAT'S THE PRINCIPAL'S WIFE LIKE, AKEMI?

...SHE LEARNED THAT SHE HAD CONCEIVED FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT.

BEFORE THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY WAS WITH HER FIANCÉ JOSEPH...

SPECIAL CLASS

"...FEAR NOT TO TAKE UNTO THEE MARY, THY WIFE."

"JOSEPH ..."

...AN ANGEL CAME TO HIM IN A DREAM AND SAID...

...

WHEN JOSEPH WAS ABOUT TO LEAVE MARY...

...THEY'RE ALL SO PRETTY, BUT OFF SOMEHOW.

EVERY-ONE IN THE SPECIAL CLASS...

!

PATTA

PATTA

PATTA

AH!

PATTA

PATTA

...

SALT?

THAT POWDER'S IN HER EAR, TOO.

PATTA

PATTA

PATTA

PATTA

PATTA

PATTA

PATTA

PATTA

YES.

AMANO.

BING BONG

THAT'S ALL FOR TODAY.

WHAT'S GOING ON?!

IT'S IN EVERY-ONE'S EARS.

OKAY ...

PLEASE GO TO HIS OFFICE.

THE PRINCIPAL WANTS TO SEE YOU.

THUS YOU WILL NOW RECEIVE THE BLESSING OF THE VIRGIN MARY.

I'M SURE YOU'VE ALREADY NOTICED, BUT WE SET THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AS A BEING ABOVE ALL OTHERS.

MARIA, I HAD YOU COME AGAIN TODAY...

...FOR A SECRET RITE—A PRAYER OF BLESSING.

AND SALT'S COMING OUT OF THEIR EARS...

IT'S... THE TRUTH IS, EVERYONE IN THE SPECIAL CLASS SEEMS STRANGE.

WHAT IS IT?

I WANTED TO ASK YOU SOME-THING FIRST.

I-IT IS?

IT'S PROOF OF THEIR DEEPENING FAITH, A VERY GOOD SIGN.

SALT? YES. SALT IS A SACRED SUBSTANCE. AN OFFERING TO GOD.

I WAS YOUNG AND CONVINCED THAT THIS BEAUTY WAS MARY'S SECOND COMING, SO I MARRIED HER.

IRONICALLY, SHE BELIEVED SHE WAS THE BLESSED VIRGIN REBORN.

AND SPEAKING OF SALT...

...MY FIRST WIFE WAS A REAL SALTY WOMAN, AND I DON'T MEAN THAT AS A COM-PLIMENT.

...SHE DESERVED TO BE STRUCK DOWN BY THE HEAVENS.

NOT ONLY WAS SHE NOT THE SECOND COMING OF MARY...

SHE WAS SELF-RIGHTEOUS AND JEALOUS. ARROGANT, COLD, A SADIST WHO LOOKED DOWN ON OTHERS.

BUT SHE DIDN'T HAVE A SHRED OF MARY'S MERCY.

I THOUGHT MY WIFE SHOULD HAVE ALSO BEEN TURNED TO A PILLAR OF SALT.

IN THE BIBLE, LOT'S WIFE IS TURNED INTO A PILLAR OF SALT FOR TURNING HER BACK ON GOD'S WORDS.

BUT SHE GRADUALLY TURNED INTO A DEEPLY ANGRY WOMAN.

AT FIRST, MISUZU WAS KIND AND BEAUTIFUL.

WHEN I MET MY WIFE MISUZU, I WAS SURE SHE WAS IT.

I SEARCHED FOR THE REAL SECOND COMING OF THE HOLY MOTHER.

!

MARIA ...

BUT I WAS WRONG THERE, TOO.

YOU ARE THE BLESSED VIRGIN HERSELF.

YOU'RE SO BEAUTI-FUL.

!

UM...

WHAT?

THIS WAY!

MARIA!

FSH

SLAM

KREEE

BUT THAT FAITH WAVERS IN ME NOW.

I HAVE BELIEVED THAT I WAS YOU REBORN.

HOLY MARY... PLEASE HEAR MY SUFFERING.

I'M ALREADY PAST 50. IF HE DOESN'T COME TO ME SOON...

HOLY MARY. WHEN WILL I BE BLESSED WITH MY JESUS?

MICHELAN-GELO SAID THAT THE BLESSED VIRGIN NEVER AGES... BUT.

I CANNOT ESCAPE AGING.

AND MY GREAT-EST PAIN IS...

AND ...

AT STUDENTS WHO LACK FAITH.

AT SLOPPY TEACH-ERS.

AND ...

I SHOULD BE FILLED WITH MERCY LIKE YOU, AND YET...

AND YET I FEEL ANGER.

AAH, BLESSED MARY! I CANNOT CONTROL MY ANGER OVER THE SLIGHTEST THINGS!

AH!

HE'S GONE.

...THAT CHEATING HUSBAND!

SECRETLY, I WONDER ...

...IS THIS THE CURSE OF MY HUSBAND'S FIRST WIFE?

WHY CAN I NOT CONTROL THESE FEELINGS?

ANGER.

THE LEAST APPRO-PRIATE EMOTION FOR THE HOLY MOTHER.

IS THIS THE TRIAL SET BEFORE ME?

...IS SHE BLOCKING MY WAY WITH HER CURSE?

AND YET...

PLEASE... PLEASE SAVE ME FROM HER.

EVEN THOUGH SHE HAD NOTHING OF THE VIRGIN ABOUT HER.

SHE NEVER HESITATED TO PROCLAIM HERSELF THE SECOND COMING OF THE MADONNA.

I AM THE TRUE SECOND COMING. THE HEAVENS SIDED WITH ME.

OONE

AH!

YOU UNDER-STAND MY SAD-NESS.

AAH, THE BLESSED VIRGIN CRIES TEARS OF BLOOD AGAIN.

...

WHO IS THERE?!

YOU WON'T GET AWAY!

!!

FSH

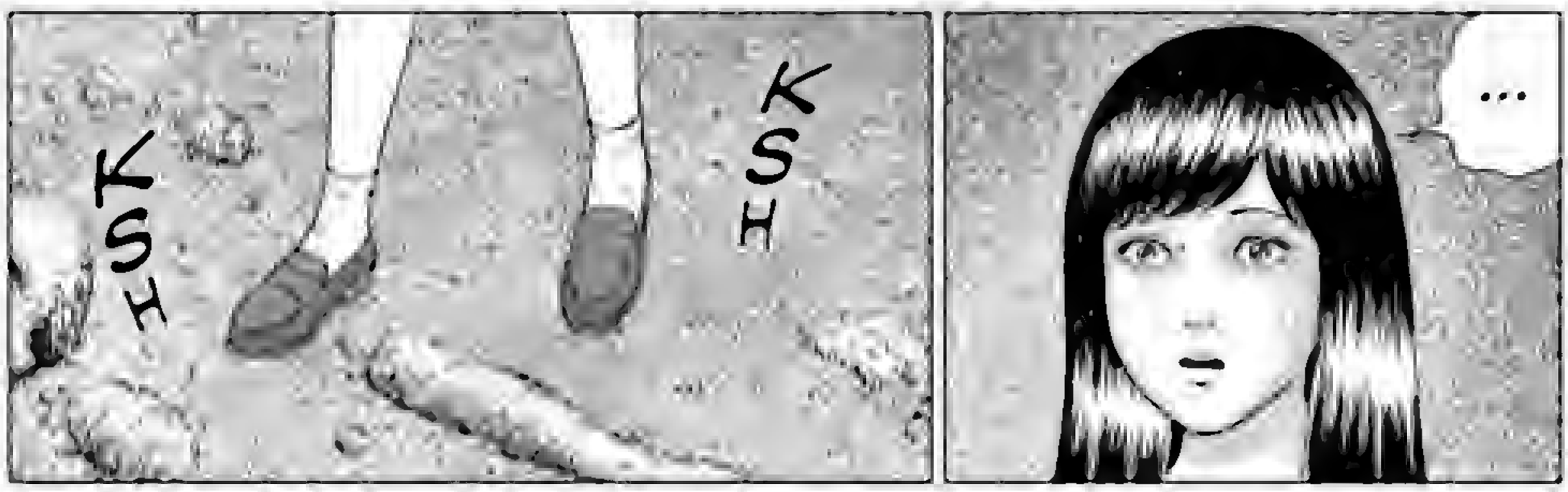
WHERE ARE YOU?!

COME OUT!

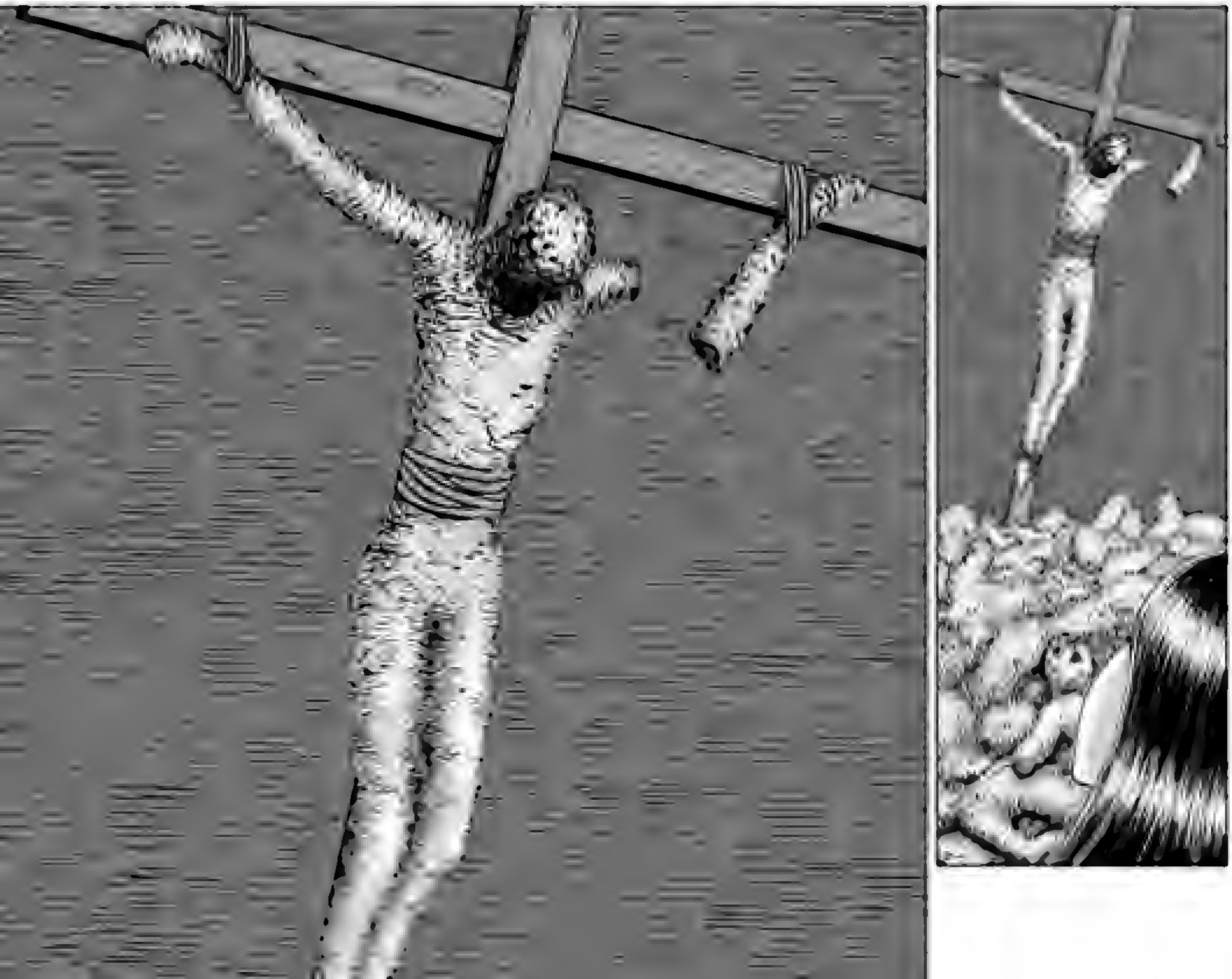
GLAS

KAUK

KSH


...
KSH
KSH

WHAT IS THIS ...?



...THERE IS SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO SAY.

BEFORE OUR PRAYERS ...

SOMEONE TRYING TO LEARN THE SECRETS OF OUR SCHOOL!

GASP

WHAT ?!

...ONE OF THE SPECIAL CLASS STUDENTS IS A SPY.

REGRET-TABLY...

...

NOW! NAME YOURSELF!

STEP FORWARD BEFORE I CALL YOUR NAME, AND YOU CAN AVOID THE WORST PUNISHMENT.

THEN I WILL NAME YOU.

WELL. I SEE.

N—

NO, SHE'S NOT!

YOU ARE A SPY!

AKEMI SAYAKO!

HELP ME!

HELP!

I'M SCARED!

EEE!

SO SCARED!

KNOW THE PUNISHMENT OF MARY!

YOU CAN'T RUN FROM ME.

CHEF

¡EEEAAAAAAAAAAH!

HSK HSK HSK HSK HSK

THOSE WHO ANNOY MARY SIMPLY HAVE THEIR BRAINS TURN TO SALT.

BUT THOSE WHO ANGER HER ARE TURNED TO PILLARS OF SALT WHERE THEY STAND! TAKE HEED, ALL OF YOU!

KUNT

IT WASN'T AKEMI. IT WAS ME!

I WAS THE ONE WATCHING YOU!

AKEMI! I'M SORRY!

THIS IS MY FAULT!

EEEEE!

THE BLESSING OF MARY.

AND THEN YOU CAME ALONG...

THE PRINCIPAL ASKED ME TO COME TO THE CHAPEL FOR A SECRET RITE.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

...

...EXPLAIN WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT.

THEN...

YOU... MARIA AMANO?

YOU RECEIVED THE BLESSING OF MARY FROM THE PRINCIPAL?

WAIT JUST A MOMENT.

...

I DID!

WHY WOULD YOU PERFORM THIS SACRED RITE ON A MERE GIRL?

THE CEREMONY WAS TO AFFIRM THAT I WAS THE TRUE SECOND COMING OF MARY, YES?

YOU REALIZED YOUR MARRIAGE TO YOUR FIRST WIFE WAS A MISTAKE.

THE BLESSING OF THE VIRGIN MARY, THE RITE YOU PERFORMED FOR ME 20 YEARS AGO.

YOU CLAIMED I WAS THE BLESSED VIRGIN, PURER AND MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN ANY OTHER.

AND I BELIEVED YOU THEN.

YOU TOLD ME YOUR EX-WIFE WAS NOT MARY AND THAT I WAS THE REAL MADONNA.

MISUZU, LISTEN TO ME.

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?!

HEH HEH HEH.

HEH...

THAT'S WHY I HELPED KILL YOUR WIFE.

MARIA AMANO.

YOU ARE THE REAL BLESSED MARY.

I'VE SEARCHED MANY YEARS FOR THE TRUE REINCARNA-TION OF THE VIRGIN.

AND I'VE FOUND HER AT LAST.

MISUZU, I'M SORRY. MY MARRIAGE TO YOU WAS ALSO A MISTAKE.

YOU ARE NOT MARY EITHER.

!

MR. TENJO!

WHAT DID YOU SAY?!

W—

... INSISTENT THAT I WAS THE ONE.

BUT MR. TENJO... YOU WERE SO...

KIYO-KAWA?!

SO THEN... YOU'RE SAYING I'M A FAKE?!

...NAME HIM JESUS.

I WAS GOING TO...

I'M SURE IT'S A BOY.

AND I WAS FINALLY BLESSED WITH YOUR CHILD. THREE MONTHS ALONG NOW.

I AM THE REAL MARY!!

HOW DARE YOU! IF I'M A FAKE, THEN HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THIS MYSTERIOUS POWER?!

THE LOVELY MARIA AMANO IS THE TRUE SECOND COMING OF MARY.

UNFORTU-NATELY, YOU'RE BOTH FAKES.

THE WOMAN WHO GIVES BIRTH TO JESUS CHRIST!!

MARY!!

ZAP

CRACK

KRRK

KLAK KLAK KLAK

CRACK

EEE-AAH!

AH!

YOU SAID YOU BURIED HER IN THE MOUN-TAINS.

WHY IS THIS WOMAN INSIDE OF MARY?

YOUR FIRST WIFE...

THAT'S... HARUYO.

H-HOW COULD YOU...!

AND THE QUICKEST WAY TO DO THAT WAS TO IMPRISON HER INSIDE OF THE STATUE OF MARY!

HEH HEH HEH.

I THOUGHT HARUYO SHOULD STAND ETERNALLY, LIKE LOT'S WIFE AS A PILLAR OF SALT RISING UP ON MOUNT SODOM.

IS THERE ANY GREATER HUMILIATION?!

SO I'VE BEEN ENTREATING THE CORPSE OF YOUR FIRST WIFE FOR THE LAST 20 YEARS?

BOO

M

EEEEEE!

B

-IAAAAA

M

WHERE DID YOU RUN OFF TO?!
WHERE ARE YOU?

THE LIGHTNING STRIKE MUST HAVE STARTED A FIRE.

HMPH. BUT THAT DOESN'T MATTER.

THIS SMOKE ...

NO WONDER THEY CALL HER "ANGRY WITCH WOMAN."

A TRULY TER-RIFYING WOMAN.

THE FINAL RESTING PLACE OF ALL THOSE WHO ANGERED THAT WITCH WOMAN.

BEHOLD. THIS MOUNTAIN OF SALT PILLARS.

THAT IS THE SON, KIRIHITO, I HAD WITH MY FIRST WIFE.

HIM LEAVING HOME WAS A LIE. THE TRUTH IS...

...HE COURTED MISUZU'S ANGER THREE YEARS AGO AND WAS TURNED INTO A PILLAR OF SALT.

BUT HE WAS A FALSE CHILD OF THE LORD. FIT TO BE A PILLAR OF SALT.

THE TRUE CHILD OF GOD...

...HAS YET TO BE BORN.

MARIA, YOU ARE THE TRUE MADONNA. I'VE FOUND YOU AT LAST.

YOU WILL MARRY ME...

...AND BECOME ...

...PREGNANT WITH...THE TRUE...

PATTA

PATTA

PATTA

PATTA

...CHILD?

HOK HOK HOK

HOK KSH KSH KSH

NGAAH!

KSSSH

KSHHH

KSHHOK

HOK HOK

EEEE!

AM

AAAAH!

SOME-ONE!

TUK

H-HELP!

I FOUND YOU, MARIA! HOW DISGUSTING THAT YOU BEAR THAT NAME!

I WILL MAKE SHORT WORK OF YOU!

FOOL! THERE'S NOWHERE LEFT TO RUN.

AH!

KOH KOH KOH KOH

TSK

TSK

HA HA HA! YOU TOO SHALL BECOME SALT ON THIS MOUNTAIN OF IT!!

EEEE!

KSSSH

HA HA HA!

KSH

EEA-AAAH!

HA HA HA!

AAAH!

KLAT

DOOM

HA HA HA!

HSK

TOK TOK

KCT

THUD

KATUNK
HNGH.
CRACKLE CRACKLE
CRACKLE CRACKLE

MADONNA

BUT NO MATTER HOW I INSISTED ON IT, NO ONE BELIEVED WHAT HAPPENED THAT NIGHT.

...THE BODIES OF MISUZU AND HARUYO WERE DISCOVERED.

THE NEXT DAY, IN THE BURNED-OUT CHURCH, MIXED IN AMONG A LARGE AMOUNT OF WHAT APPEARED TO BE ROCK SALT...

MADONNA/END

THE SPIRIT FLOW OF AOKIGAHARA

HIS GIRLFRIEND MIKA CAME WITH HIM, SAYING THEY WOULD GO TOGETHER.

DESPAIRING AFTER FALLING ILL WITH A PROGRESSIVE DISEASE, NORIO TANIGUCHI ENTERED MOUNT FUJI'S SEA OF TREES TO DIE ON HIS OWN TERMS.

LET'S SET UP THE TENT TONIGHT AND DO IT TOMOR-ROW.

MIKA, IT'S DANGEROUS TO KEEP ON WALKING.

...LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO DIE.

BUT THE AREA BEGAN TO GROW DARK WHILE THEY WERE...

LOOK THERE.

OH! NORIO.

OKAY.

WSH WSH WSH WSH WSH WSH WSH WSH

IT'S GLOWING AND MOVING THROUGH THE WOODS.

YEAH, WHAT IS THAT?

WHAT IS IT? IT'S GLOWING.

A BEAM OF LIGHT... FLOWING?

ZSH ZSH ZSH ZSH ZSH ZSH ZSH ZSH

WSH WSH WSH WSH WSH WSH WSH WSH

THE STRANGE LIGHT CONTINUED WELL INTO THE NIGHT.

MM-HMM.

WASN'T IT AROUND HERE? WHERE THAT LIGHT WAS?

THE NEXT MORNING ...

HUH?

...SO SMOOTH, LIKE THEIR BARK'S BEEN PEELED OFF.

PLUS THEY'RE ALL...

THEY'RE ALL LEANING THE SAME DIRECTION.

THE TREES HERE LOOK WEIRD.

AND THEY'VE LOST ALL THEIR LEAVES.

IT KEEPS GOING TO EITHER SIDE, LIKE A BELT. THIS WAY'S MOUNT FUJI.

WHY JUST HERE?

NO, IT'S NOT JUST HERE. LOOK.

TOWARD MOUNT FUJI.

YEAH. LET'S FOLLOW IT FOR A BIT.

I FEEL LIKE THAT LIGHT LAST NIGHT'S PART OF THIS.

I'M GOING TO DIE ANYWAY.

DOESN'T MATTER.

YOU CAN'T PUSH YOURSELF TOO HARD.

NORIO, YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE A BREAK?

HOW FAR DOES IT GO?

HAAH HAAH

AH!

IT...
IT LOOKS KIND OF LIKE A DRAGON'S FACE.

THE WEIRD THING WITH THE TREES ENDS AT THE CAVE HERE.

I KNOW THERE ARE A BUNCH OF CAVES FROM WHERE LAVA FLOWED THROUGH FUJI'S FOREST, BUT THERE'S NOTHING ONLINE ABOUT A CAVE LIKE THIS.

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN SAYING IT EXISTS FOREVER, BUT I HEARD IT'S REALLY HARD TO GET TO.

I GUESS DRAGON'S MOUTH IS THE EXIT FOR THE "SPIRIT FLOW."

OH! MAYBE IT'S THAT CAVE, DRAGON'S MOUTH.

SUPPOSEDLY, THE SPIRITS SPILL OUT OF THE DRAGON'S MOUTH.

AND IT LOOKS LIKE THE DRAGON'S STICKING ITS TONGUE OUT, SO THE FLOW'S ALSO CALLED THE DRAGON'S TONGUE.

SPIRIT FLOW?

IT'S THIS PHENOME-NON WHERE SPIRITS MOVE TOGETHER IN A CLUSTER.

THE SPIRITS GO ON TO PARADISE AFTERWARD.

OR THEY'RE SUCKED BACK INTO ANOTHER CAVE. LOTS OF THEORIES.

THERE'S A NETWORK OF COUNTLESS CAVES BENEATH THE FOREST, AND SOME PEOPLE SAY THE SPIRIT FLOW ACTUALLY RUNS FREELY IN ALL DIRECTIONS.

MIKA.

I HATE THIS... NORIO, I'M SCARED.

IT'S NOT SURPRISING THIS KIND OF STRANGE PHENOME-NON WOULD HAPPEN.

MOUNT FUJI IS JAPAN'S MOST SACRED MOUNTAIN.

MIKA, YOU GO ON HOME.

I'M STAYING HERE TO WAIT FOR THE SPIRIT FLOW.

I WANT TO SEE IT WITH THESE EYES BEFORE I DIE.

IF THIS REALLY IS DRAGON'S MOUTH, THEN THE SPIRIT FLOW'LL SHOW UP AGAIN.

I'LL WAIT, TOO!

NO! WE SAID WE WOULD DIE TOGETHER!

WHAT ?!

I DON'T CARE. AS LONG AS I'M WITH YOU!

BUT WE DON'T KNOW WHEN IT'LL HAPPEN. AND WE DON'T HAVE ANY FOOD.

YOU THINK IT'LL HAPPEN TONIGHT?

IT'S GETTING DARK.

QUIET!

SHH.

AND SO THIRSTY.

I'M HUNGRY.

GRRRR

RRRRRRRRRR

RSH RSH RSH RSH RSH

RRRRRRRR

WHAT

RRRRSSHH

THEY'RE ALL TRYING TO REACH THE LAND OF THE DEAD!

INCRED-IBLE! A RAGING TORRENT OF SOULS!

I-I'M SCARED!

MIKA, LOOK! THE SPIRIT FLOW!

IF YOU'RE COMING, THEN COME!

NORIO! DON'T!

MIKA! I'M JUMPING IN!

MAYBE I CAN GET THERE TOO IF I'M SWALLOWED UP IN THIS FLOW.

WHAT ?!

WHD

NORIO!

WWW
HHH
DDD

RRRR

RRRRRRRRRRSSHH

YOU CAN'T GO OFF AND LEAVE ME ALL ALONE!

AH!

NORIO!

NORIO!

THE NEXT DAY ...

NORIO ?!

WHEN I ACTUALLY GOT IN THERE, I GOT SCARED AND GRABBED ON TO A TREE.

M-MIKA...

YOU'RE ALIVE.

NORIO !

THE FORCE OF THE SPIRIT FLOW WAS OVERWHELMING... I CLUNG TO THE TREE, AND THE SOULS PUSHED PAST, LICKING ME.

MY BODY'S STILL SLICK WITH IT.

I'M NOT IN AS MUCH PAIN AS USUAL.

MIKA, IT'S WEIRD. I FEEL REALLY GREAT SOMEHOW.

I-IT'S JUST...

WHAT'S WRONG? WHY ARE YOU LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT?

THANK GOD...

TH—

WHAT? REALLY ?!

THAT'S WONDER-FUL.

I DON'T WANT TO DIE ANYMORE.

MAYBE THE SPIRIT FLOW HAS SOME KIND OF POWER.

STRANGELY, I'M NOT HUNGRY. MAYBE THIS TOO IS THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT FLOW.

BUT WE'LL NEED FOOD AND WATER FOR THAT. I'M ALREADY STARVING.

I'M GOING TO STAY HERE FOR A WHILE.

MIKA, I WANT TO SOAK IN THE SPIRIT FLOW. I FEEL LIKE I COULD GET EVEN HEALTHIER.

WHAT? BUT...

WE'LL EAT, AND THEN YOU HAVE TO GO HOME.

LET'S GO THAT WAY FIRST.

I'M FINE. THERE'LL BE A STORE OUT ON THE HIGHWAY.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? NO! YOU HAVE TO EAT!

WORRIED, MIKA RETURNED TO AOKIGAHARA.

BUT TWO WEEKS PASSED, AND NORIO STILL DIDN'T COME BACK.

REALLY? FOR REAL?! MAKE SURE YOU DO!

YOU GO NOW AND I'LL COME NEXT WEEK.

KSH

KSH

I JUST HAVE TO FIND THE TRACES OF THAT SPIRIT FLOW...

WILL I BE ABLE TO MAKE IT TO DRAGON'S MOUTH CAVE?

HAAH.

HAAH.

AND THE SUN'S SETTING SOON.

IT'S NO USE... I CAN'T FIND ANY SIGN OF IT.

A-A SUICIDE ...

AAAH!

IT'S DANGEROUS TO COME OUT HERE BY YOURSELF.

MIKA.

IT IS ME. ARE YOU SURPRISED TO SEE ME LOOKING SO HEALTHY?

AAH, YOU SCARED ME.

NORIO? THAT'S YOU, RIGHT?

WHAT ?!

THERE'S THAT, BUT LOOKING AT YOU, SOMETHING'S...

THMP

THIS IS MITSUYA WADA.

I MADE A FRIEND WHILE YOU WERE GONE, MIKA.

I OWE NORIO MY LIFE.

IT'S NICE TO MEET YOU.

HE'S ONLY BEEN IN A FEW TIMES, BUT HE'S ALREADY IN LOVE WITH SPIRIT FLOW BATHING, TOO.

HE CAME TO THE FOREST TO DIE, TOO, BUT WHEN HE RAN INTO ME, I URGED HIM TO ENTER THE SPIRIT FLOW.

HEY, NORIO. I CAME TO GET YOU. THAT'S ENOUGH SPIRIT FLOW.

H-HI...

DON'T BE RIDICULOUS! YOU CAN'T STAY HERE FOREVER!

THE SENSATION OF THE SPIRITS LICKING YOU ALL OVER IS REALLY SOMETHING ELSE. RIGHT, MITSUYA?

UH-HUH.

MITSUYA AND I AREN'T LEAVING YET. WE WANT TO SOAK IN THE SPIRIT FLOW.

I CAN, TOO! I BROUGHT FOOD AND WATER JUST IN CASE.

LOTS! ENOUGH FOR YOU, TOO.

MIKA, YOU CAN'T LIVE HERE.

NO! I'M NOT LEAVING WITHOUT YOU.

THAT'S WHY I TOLD YOU TO GO ON AHEAD. WE'LL LEAVE ONCE WE'RE DONE HERE.

HEH HEH HEH!

I'M SURE IT'S THANKS TO THE SPIRIT FLOW'S POWER.

WHAT ?!

WE DON'T NEED ANY.

UH-HUH.

WE'RE NOT HUNGRY AT ALL. RIGHT, MITSUYA?

YES, IT'S COMING.

THE SPIRIT FLOW WILL COME TONIGHT.

...

RRRRRRR

HOO-
EEE!

HERE IT
COMES!

EEEEE!

RRRRRR

TMP TMP

PLRT

PLRT

YAHOO!

OKAY! DIVE IN!

EVERY TIME...

...THE EXTRAORDI-NARY SPIRIT FLOW CAME, NORIO AND MITSUYA WOULD JUMP IN.

...

ONE DAY, A STRANGE MAN CAME ALONG.

HE SAID HE WAS A YOU-TUBER.

CURIOUSLY, WITH EACH DIVE, THE PAIR SEEMED TO BECOME MORE AND MORE POLISHED.

MAYBE A REAL DISCOV-ERY.

WHOA! THIS CAVE IS HUGE! IT'S NOT IN THE GUIDEBOOK.

NOTHING. CAMPING.

HELLO. WHAT ARE YOU ALL DOING HERE?

BUT AFTER AN HOUR...

AFTER A BRIEF CON-VERSATION, THE MAN WENT INTO THE CAVE.

NO. WE HAVEN'T GONE IN YET.

HAVE YOU ALL GONE INSIDE?

WHAT'S WRONG? ARE YOU OKAY?

WWWWW!

...HE CAME BACK IN AN AGITATED STATE.

WHAT?

STREAM-
LINED...

S-STREAM-
LINED...

WELL, IT *IS* THE SPIRIT FLOW CAVE. YOU CAN'T JUST WALTZ IN THERE.

EEEEEE!

WHAT DID THAT GUY SEE?

STREAM-
LINED!

EEEEEE!

DASH

YUP, EXACTLY.

NO, WE DON'T NEED CLOTHES. THEY'LL JUST GET RIPPED UP WHEN WE DIVE INTO THE FLOW.

MITSUYA, IS MEDIUM GOOD? WHAT'S YOUR WAIST SIZE?

HEY. YOU'RE BOTH NUDISTS NOW, *HUH?* I'LL GO BUY YOU SOME CLOTHES TOMORROW.

YOURS TOO, MITSUYA.

NORIO, YOUR BODY'S GOR-GEOUS.

THAT'S RIGHT.

WHY NOT? IT'S A SHAME TO HIDE OUR BEAUTIFUL BODIES.

COME ON! I DON'T WANT TO DEAL WITH YOU NAKED!

TH-THIS IS WEIRD... I LOVED THE OLD NORIO.

HONESTLY. NOW THAT I HAVE THIS BODY, A NORMAL ONE LOOKS SO CRUDE.

OF OUR BEAUTIFUL BODIES?

ARE YOU JEALOUS?

YUP.

PERHAPS ANY EXCESS FAT IS LICKED AWAY BY THE SPIRITS.

YEAH. WHEN YOU LICK A LOLLIPOP, IT GETS SKINNIER. KINDA LIKE THAT, *HUH?*

BUT WHY DO OUR BODIES SHAPE UP WHEN WE SOAK IN THE SPIRIT FLOW?

YOU SHOULD BATHE IN THE SPIRIT FLOW, TOO, MIKA.

AAH! STOP IT! THAT TICKLES!

LICK

LICK

LICK

OH HO! LIKE THIS?

SHE ISN'T BRAVE ENOUGH FOR THAT.

THE SPIRIT FLOW... IS IT REALLY JUST SPIRITS FLOWING?

BY THE WAY, NORIO, LATELY I'VE BEEN FEELING LIKE...

...

I DO FEEL... SOME-THING...

...MORE SUBSTANTIVE. DIFFERENT FROM THE SPIRITS BRUSHING PAST.

IT'S JUST...

WHERE'D THAT COME FROM? WHAT A STRANGE THING TO SAY.

YEAH. NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT...

...I FEEL LIKE THERE'S SOME SPECIAL THING MIXED IN WITH IT.

YES. IT'S SOMETHING ONLY WE WOULD KNOW BECAUSE WE'VE TRIED IT.

RIGHT?! YOU CAN'T KNOW WITHOUT TRYING IT.

...ARE YOU BE-LITTLING ME?

W-WHAT... ARE YOU TWO...

SEE! HERE IT COMES!

LOOKS LIKE IT'LL COME AGAIN TONIGHT.

YES, IT'S COMING.

I MEAN, I—!!

DON'T MAKE FUN OF ME!

RRRSH

WHOA! LOOKIT HER GO!

OH! MIKA JUMPED IN!

DASH

PLRRFK

RRRRRRRSSHH

?

THE FLOW IS INTENSE. SHE COULDN'T STOP HERSELF.

NORIO... SHE WENT ON TO THE OTHER SIDE.

SHE HAD BEEN WASHED AWAY.

THE SPIRIT FLOW LEFT, AND MIKA WAS ALSO GONE.

STREAM-LINED?

ALMOST STREAM-LINED.

NORIO, ARE WE EVEN FURTHER POLISHED?

...

IT'S PRETTY DARK...

WHAT EXACTLY DID HE SEE IN THIS CAVE?

YEAH, HE DID SAY THAT.

THAT'S WHAT THAT YOUTUBER SAID— "STREAMLINED."

FLASH

IT WORKS!

OH! A FLASHLIGHT. THAT YOUTUBER MUST HAVE DROPPED IT.

AH!

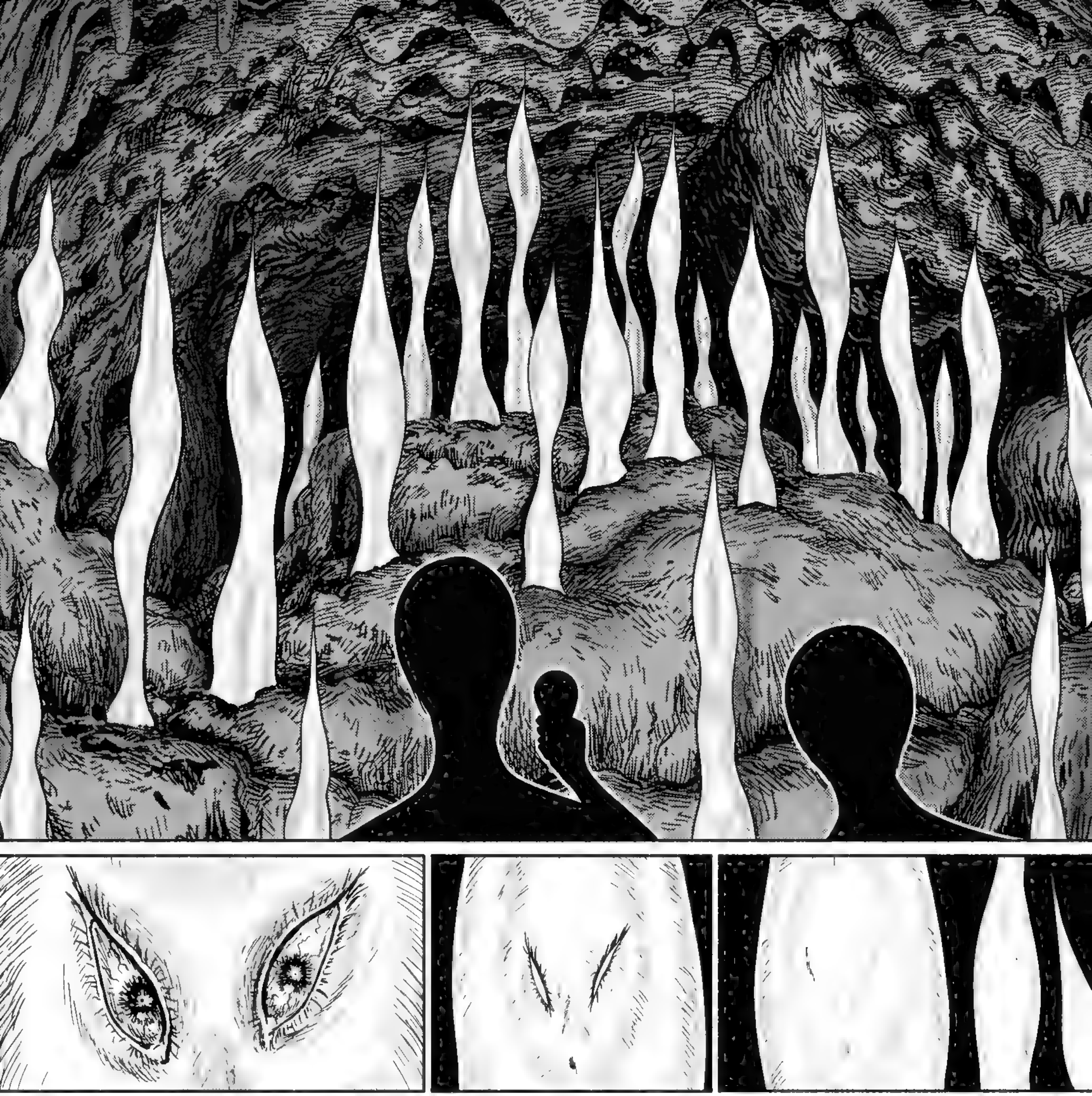
SHH! QUIET.

IT'S PRETTY DEEP.

SOME-ONE'S IN HERE.

HEE HEE.

HEE HEE HEE.



AH!

SPLSH

SPLSH

STREAM-
LINED...

NORIO.

HEE HEE.

BUT WE CAME BACK THROUGH THE UNDER-GROUND CAVES.

THE SPIRIT FLOW DIS-APPEARED AT THE EDGE OF THE FOREST.

THESE PEOPLE SAVED ME.

MIKA? YOU'RE OKAY? BUT WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?

ANCESTORS WHO CAME TO KILL THEMSELVES AND BECAME SLAVES TO THE SPIRIT FLOW.

YES. THESE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN HERE FOR A LONG TIME.

"THESE PEOPLE"? THOSE ARE HUMAN BEINGS?!

SO THEN...THE SHADOWS IN THE SPIRIT FLOW...

...TO TRUST EVERY-THING TO THE SPIRIT FLOW?

I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU TWO HAVE THE COURAGE...

W-WHAT?

BUT THEY DON'T CLING TO THE TREES LIKE YOU DO.

THEY'VE BEEN GOING ROUND ALL THIS TIME.

HEY! SPIRIT FLOW'S COMIIIIING!

OH, WE'LL DO IT!

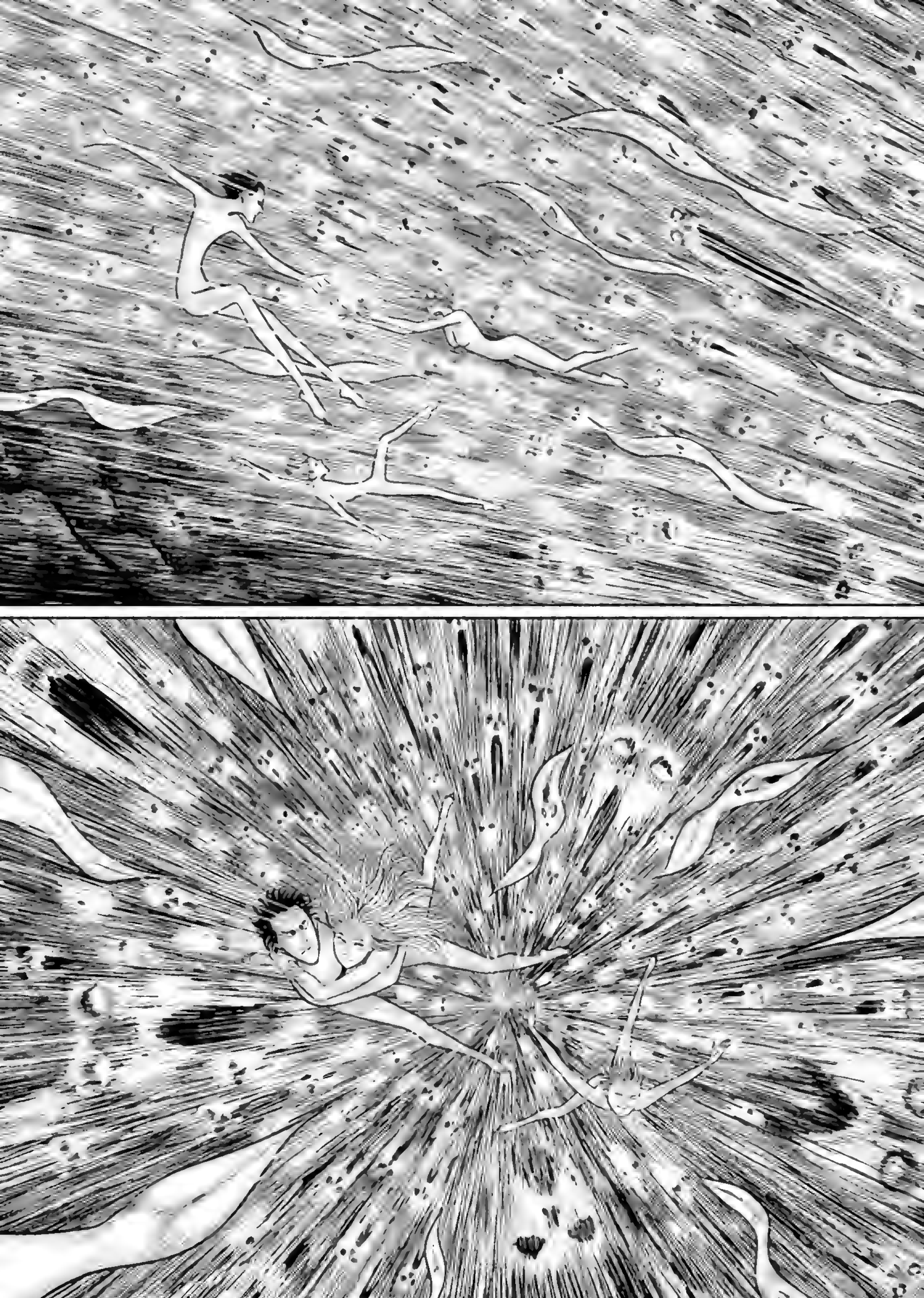
DAM-MIT!

RRRRR

RSH

RRRRSH

RRRR



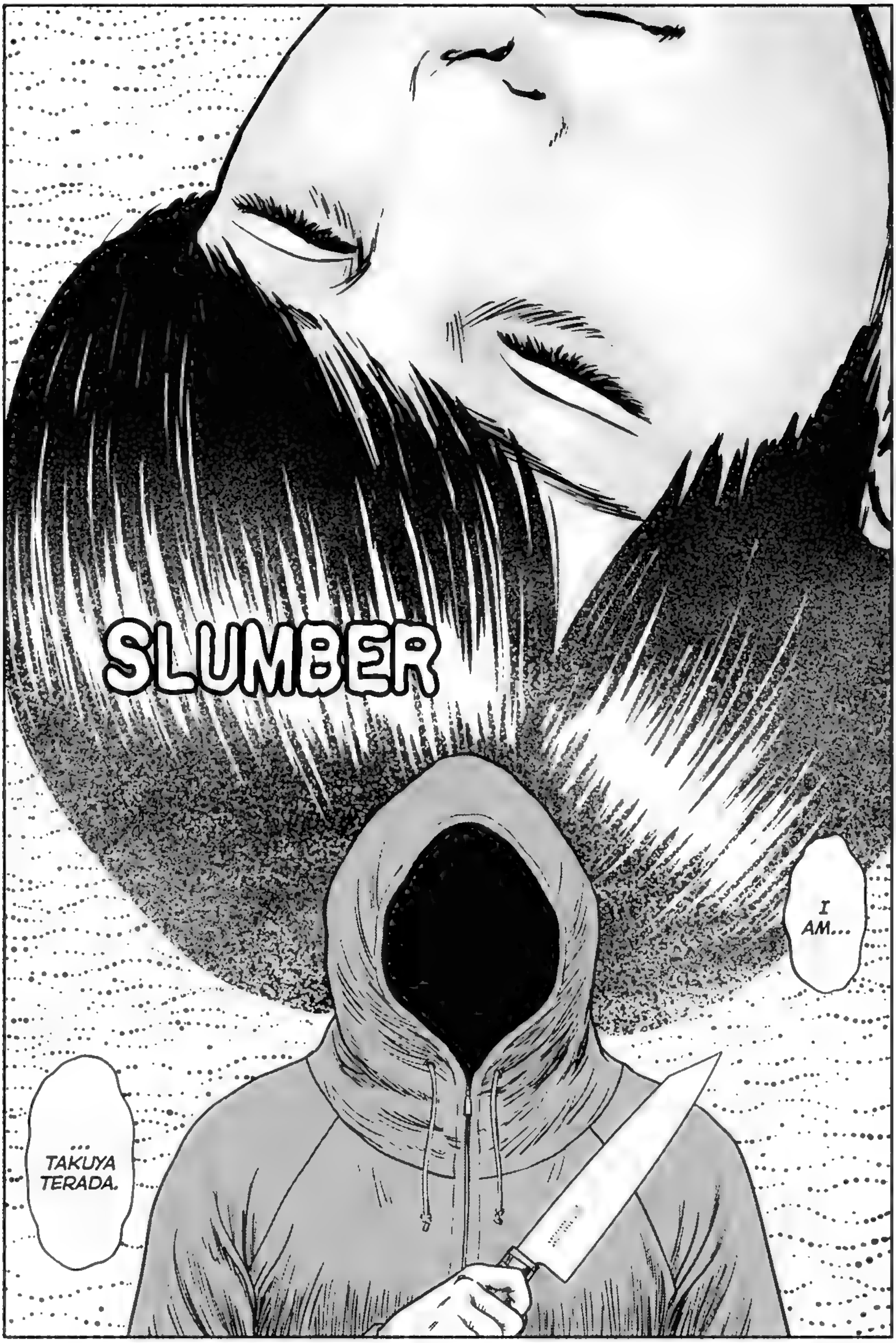
RRRRRRRRSSSHHH

AS TO WHETHER OR NOT THE SPIRIT FLOW TRULY EXISTS IN THE FOREST OF AOKIGAHARA...

AND SO THE STRANGE WOULD-BE SUICIDES GO ROUND IN ECSTASY AGAIN TONIGHT IN THE VIOLENT FLOW OF THE SPIRITS.

...ONLY THOSE WHO REACH THE CAVE OF DRAGON'S MOUTH KNOW. LET'S JUST LEAVE IT AT THAT.

THE SPIRIT FLOW OF AOKIGAHARA/END


SLUMBER
I AM...
...TAKUYA TERADA.

A MOMENT OF UNPARALLELED BLISS.

ALMOST AS THOUGH I HAD RETURNED TO CHILDHOOD.

IN THE MORNING, WHEN I WAKE UP FROM A DEEP SLEEP...

...THERE IS A MOMENT WHEN MY MIND IS NEW.

HAVE YOU HAD THIS EXPERIENCE?

I HAVE.

THE MORE SEVERE THE GAP BETWEEN SLUMBER AND REALITY, THE MORE THE MEMORIES RUSH INTO MY BRAIN LIKE AN ANGRY WAVE.

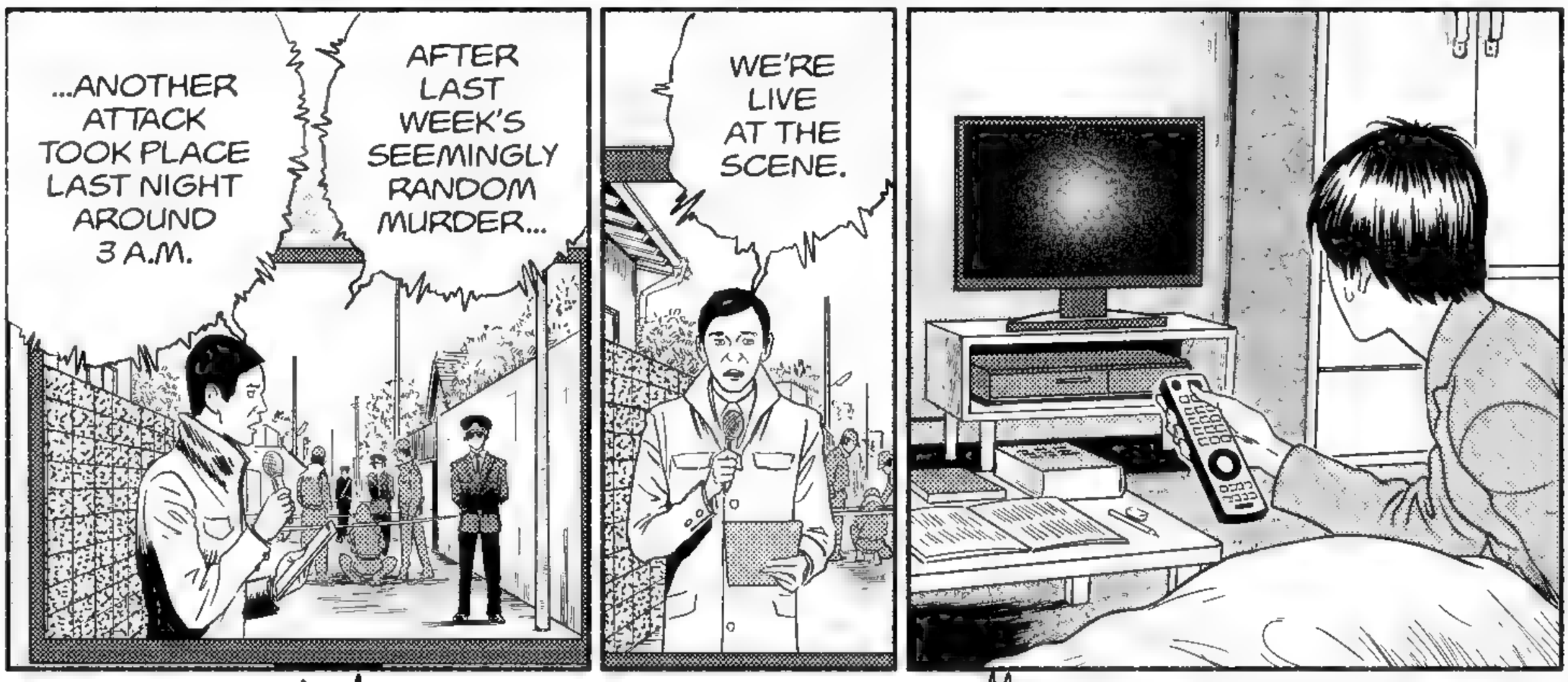
I AM TORTURED BY THE PAIN OF REALITY.

BUT THIS ECSTASY IS FLEETING. IN THE NEXT INSTANT, MEMORIES OF A HARSH REALITY CLOSE IN ON ME.

...ON THE MORNING AFTER KILLING SOMEONE.

FOR INSTANCE ...

HUH?


...ANOTHER ATTACK TOOK PLACE LAST NIGHT AROUND 3 A.M.
AFTER LAST WEEK'S SEEMINGLY RANDOM MURDER...
WE'RE LIVE AT THE SCENE.

SUCCES
VICTO
THE M.O. AND ITEMS AT THE SCENE ARE SIMILAR TO LAST WEEK'S INCIDENT, AND POLICE ARE ASSUMING BOTH CRIMES ARE THE WORK OF THE SAME PERSON.
...AND WRAPPED IN A LONG, HOODED SWEATER THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN WORN BY THE MURDERER.
THE VICTIM WAS STABBED WITH A WEAPON...
THEY ARE CURRENTLY QUESTIONING PEOPLE IN THE AREA, LOOKING FOR LEADS.

MS. KUBOTA WAS ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED NEXT MONTH.

THE VICTIM WAS AI KUBOTA, AN OFFICE WORKER WHO LIVED IN THE CITY.

AI KUBOTA (DECEASED)

...DID IT AGAIN.

I...

AAAAH!

THRNK

THRNK

HUSH...

...A-BYE, BABY.

WHEN THE WIND BLOWS ...

ON THE TREE TOP.

...THE CRADLE WILL ROCK.

AND DOWN WILL COME BABY...

... CRADLE AND ALL.

...THE CRADLE WILL FALL.

WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS ...

AND THEN I CRAWLED INTO BED, STILL EXCITED.

WHEN I GOT HOME, I WASHED THE BLOOD OFF MY HANDS AND FACE.

AFTER DEFTLY FINISHING IT, I HURRIED AWAY.

BUT I DON'T UNDER-STAND.

...HOW THE CRIME SCENE, THE METHOD — AND ABOVE ALL ELSE, THE VICTIM'S FACE —ARE EXACTLY WHAT'S IN MY MEMORY.

IT WASN'T A DREAM. THE PROOF IS...

otification
of Results
ion: Tokyo
No.: 00123
nee ID: 2034752
Name: Takuya Terada
m Points/Rank
t: 65.63 Q1
ect: 98.75 Q1 E Q2
ject: 70.82 Q1 F Q2
Points: 55.78
290.98
Rank: 2698
Points/Ran
68

I-IT'S TRUE LIFE'S KIND OF HARD RIGHT NOW.

I'VE ALREADY FAILED THE BAR EXAM THREE TIMES.

TAKUYA TERADA, FUTURE LAWYER.

WHY AM I RANDOMLY ATTACKING PEOPLE?! ME!!

BUT... I MEAN, TO KILL PEOPLE BECAUSE OF THAT...

THAT'S ABSURD. IT JUST DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.

I GOT MY PARENTS TO RENT THIS APARTMENT SO I COULD LIVE BY MYSELF AND STUDY, BUT THEY'RE NOT GOING TO SUPPORT ME FOREVER.

I'M SO ANXIOUS ABOUT THE FUTURE, I FEEL LIKE I'M LOSING IT.

AAH, I'M SO CONFUSED!

AND WHEN DID I BUY THE HOODED PARKA?! AND THE KNIFE AND THE GLOVES...

I'M SURE I WENT TO BED AROUND ONE LAST NIGHT AFTER STUDYING FOR THE BAR.

I REMEMBER NOW.

AAAH ...

AH!

...

ALL-PURPOSE KITCHEN KNIFE

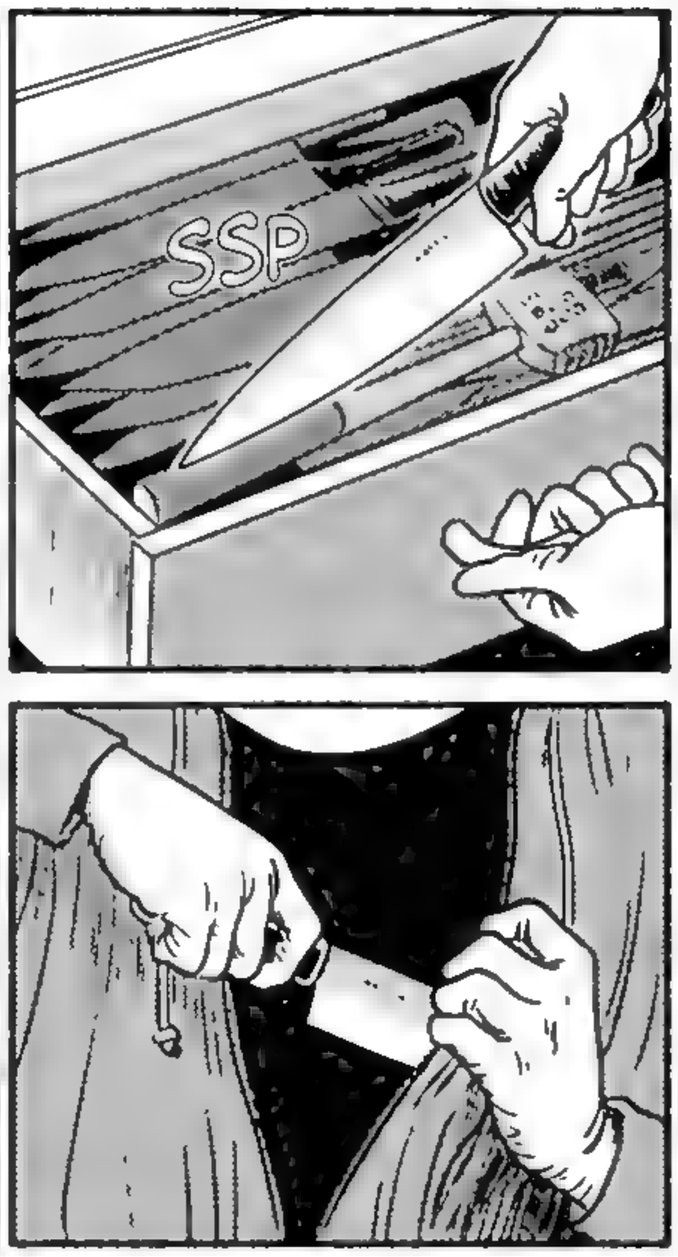
THERE'S ABSOLUTELY NO DOUBT NOW.

I'M A MURDERER.

AT SETAGAYA HAPPY MALL.

I DID BUY A HOODED PARKA AND A KNIFE AND GLOVES.

HOW COULD I HAVE FORGOTTEN ?


SSP

TLENZK
TLENZK

...THE CRADLE WILL FALL.

WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS ...

AH!

AND DOWN WILL COME BABY...

...CRADLE AND ALL.

THE VICTIM WAS AN OFFICE WORKER.

ANOTHER MURDER OCCURRED LAST NIGHT!

HE SAW ME.

NO.

IT'S ALL OVER NOW.

HE SAW ME.

...THAT COULD LEAD TO THE MURDERER.

SOME OUTLETS ARE REPORTING THAT THERE IS INFORMATION THIS TIME...

LIFE SENTENCE.

TRIAL.

SURRENDER.

MEDIA.

WITNESS.

INVESTIGATION.

ARREST.

MEDIA.

TRIAL.

APPEAL.

DEATH PENALTY.

DISMISSAL.

HANGING.

HANG-ING.
DEATH PEN-ALTY.
RE-TRIAL.
DEATH PEN-ALTY.
TRIAL.
FAMILY DE-STROYED.
MEDIA.
SURREN-DER.
!

I'M OVER-THINKING THIS.

HAAH!

HAAH!

KACHAK

KACHAK

KACHAK

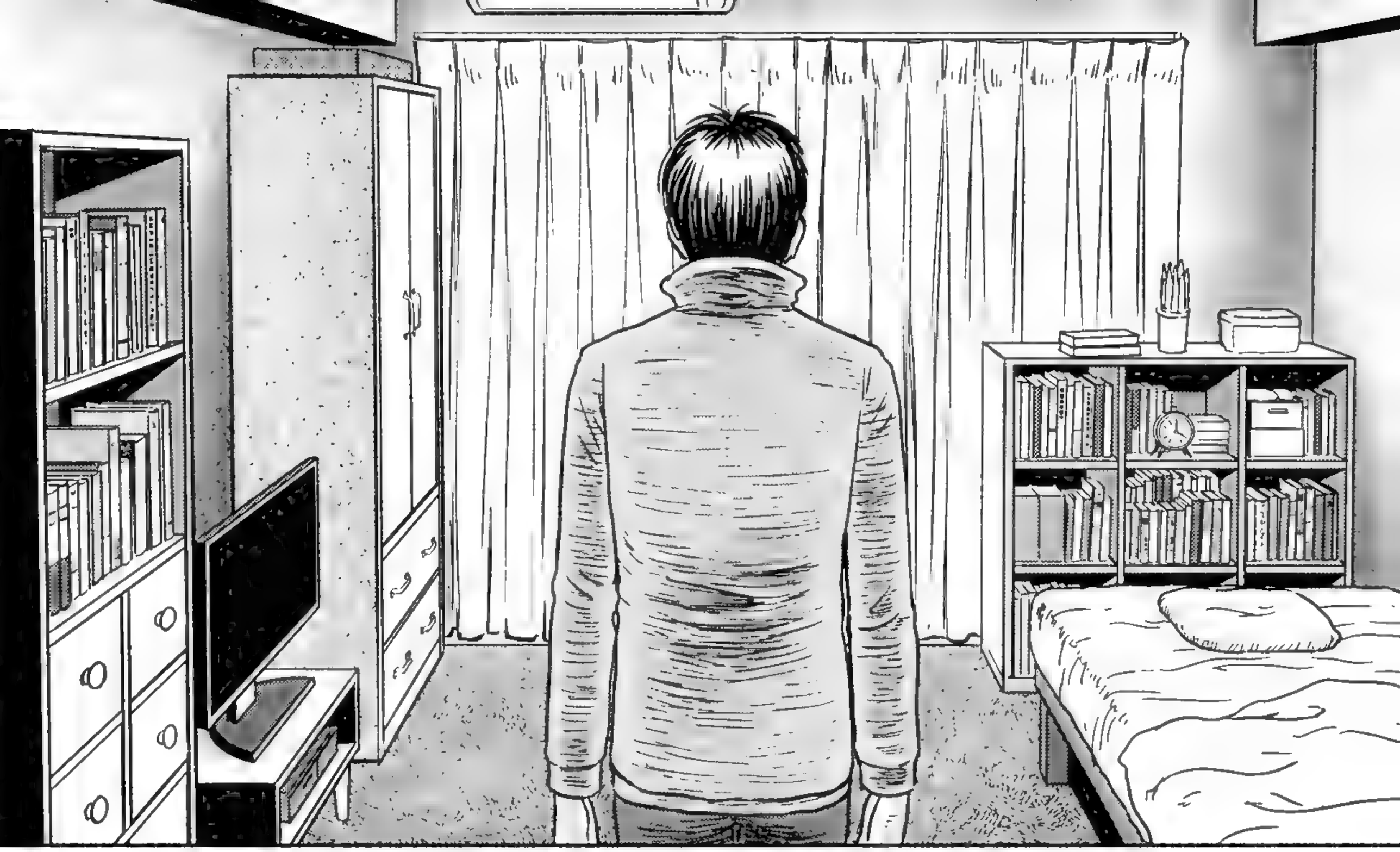
HUH?!

BECAUSE I WAS GOING TO TURN MYSELF IN.

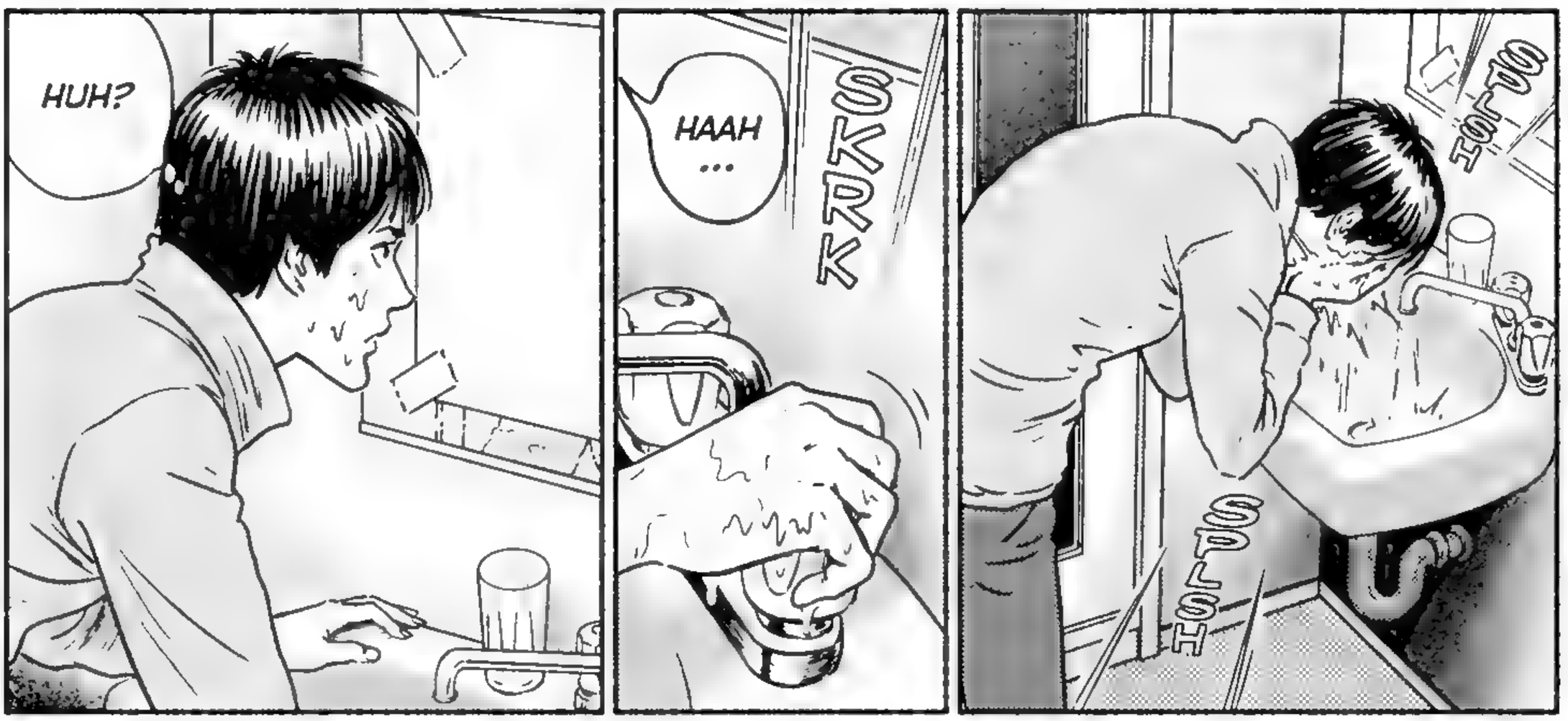
I DIDN'T LOCK IT.

OH! IT'S OPEN.

RIGHT.



SWAY
PSSHHH
...
AAH...


HUH?
HAAH ...
SKKKS
GLUG!
SPLSH

RIP!

THERE'S PAPER TAPED TO THE MIRROR... I DON'T REMEMBER DOING THAT.

HUH?

SOME-THING'S WEIRD...

DOUBLE-SIDED TAPE

A BUR-GLAR?

WAS SOMEONE IN HERE WHILE I WAS GONE?

NO WAY.

AH ?!

CLACK

WHEN DID I BUY ALL THESE?

SO MANY HOODED PARKAS...

FWD FWD

GARBAGE COLLECTION

MON/THU

KA-CHA-CK

I COULD ESCAPE FROM REALITY AND SLEEP WITHOUT DREAMING.

SLEEPING USED TO BE MY FAVORITE THING.

AND I COULD ENJOY A MOMENT OF PURE ECSTASY IN THE FIRST SECONDS OF WAKING.

I'M AFRAID TO GO TO SLEEP.

402

TAKUYA TERADA

THE BLISS RIGHT BEFORE MAKES THE REALITY AFTERWARD EVEN MORE HORRIBLE.

BUT REALITY IS TOO SCARY NOW.

EVEN IF IT WAS ONLY FOR A SECOND AND THEN HARSH REALITY CAME BACK TO ME.

THAT KEPT ME GOING.

SCARED ...

I'M SCARED ...

SLEEP ...

...TO SLEEP.

...THE CRADLE WILL ROCK.

WHEN THE WIND BLOWS...

ON THE TREE-TOP.

HUSH-A-BYE, BABY.

... CRADLE AND ALL—

AND DOWN WILL COME BABY...

...THE CRADLE WILL FALL.

WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS ...

GASP

VIDEO OF WHAT IS THOUGHT TO BE THE MURDERER CAUGHT ON A SECURITY CAMERA HAS BEEN RELEASED BY THE INVESTIGATION.

AND HERE WE HAVE NEW INFORMATION.

YET ANOTHER VICTIM WAS FOUND LAST NIGHT.

THIS MAKES FOUR IN TOTAL.

THEY ARE PROCEEDING WITH ANALYSIS OF THE VIDEO AND...

...ASKING RESIDENTS TO CALL IN WITH ANY INFORMATION.

PENDING

ARREST.

HANG-ING.

DING DONG

THE POLICE?!

DING DONG

DING DONG

OPEN THE DOOR! YOU'RE IN THERE, AREN'T YOU?!

TAKUYA!

BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG

HUH?

WHAT'S WRONG? YOU LOOK AWFUL.

T-TAKUYA ...

W-WHAT? KANAMI ?!

YOU TURNED YOUR PHONE OFF, DIDN'T YOU?

TAKUYA!

KACHAK

Y-YEAH. I'M JUST TIRED...

I KNOW THE BAR EXAM'S TOUGH, BUT YOU HAVE TO SLEEP.

SO? HOW IS IT?

GREAT.

I KNOW.

LET'S WATCH THAT DVD.

BEEP

POP

JOKER THE RIPPER

NOOOOO!!
AAAAAH!
AAAAH!!

KANAMI.

IT'S ME.

AAAAAH!

TAKUYA ?!

WHAT'S WRONG, TAKUYA?!

I'M THE KILLER!

I DID IT!

YOU WOULD NEVER DO ANYTHING LIKE THAT.

I DON'T BELIEVE IT.

WHY WOULD YOU SUDDENLY WAKE UP AND KILL PEOPLE?

I MEAN, YOU WOULD'VE BEEN ASLEEP AT THE TIMES OF THE CRIMES.

I REMEM-BER IT, THOUGH.

BUT IT'S STRANGE.

HEY, TAKUYA? HAVE YOU HEARD OF TOMO YANO?

HUH? WHO'S THAT?

IT'S TOO WEIRD THAT YOU'D REMEMBER LATER.

AND YOU DIDN'T REMEMBER BUYING THE PARKA OR THE KNIFE AT FIRST.

PEOPLE ONLINE ARE SAYING THAT THE M.O. IS THE SAME AS THESE CASES.

Tomo Yano,
Condemned Prisoner

HE MURDERED SEVERAL PEOPLE TEN YEARS AGO AND GOT THE DEATH PENALTY LAST YEAR.

DISMISSAL OF THE FINAL APPEAL. ...ON UPON DEATH ...ENTENCE.

HUH?

...

THAT HAPPENED ...?

AND THE REAL MURDERER IS SOMEONE ELSE.

IN WHICH CASE, YANO WAS EXECUTED EVEN THOUGH HE DIDN'T DO IT.

BUT SOME PEOPLE SAY IT'S ACTUALLY THE WORK OF THE SAME PERSON.

MAYBE THE MURDERER IS COPYING THE KILLINGS FROM BACK THEN.

AND NOW YOU'RE TORTURED WITH THIS GUILT.

AFTER SUCH GRUE-SOME CRIMES. CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT?

ALSO, WHAT'S WEIRD IS THAT YANO TURNED HIMSELF IN.

SO THEN WHAT IS IT? THE REAL KILLER'S SOMEONE ELSE, AND HIS MEMORIES ARE PLAYING IN MY HEAD?

I DON'T KNOW.

THEN IT ALL MAKES SENSE.

MAYBE I HAVE A SPLIT PERSONALITY.

...I HEARD YOU CAN'T ACTUALLY REMEMBER THE OTHER PERSONALITY'S MEMORIES, THOUGH.

WITH SPLIT PER-SONALITY— OR RATHER, DISSO-CIATIVE IDENTITY DISOR-DER...

I'LL GO GET A CAMERA TOMORROW. YOU MAKE SURE TO STAY HOME AT NIGHT, OKAY?

AND IF YOU'RE HERE AT THE TIME OF AN INCIDENT, THEN YOU HAVE AN ALIBI.

WE'LL TAPE YOU SO THERE'S A RECORD.

OKAY, HOW ABOUT THIS?

WE'LL SET UP A CAMERA IN HERE.

IT'S DEFINITELY NOT YOU.

DON'T WORRY!

IF IT DOES, I'LL KILL MYSELF.

BUT, KANAMI, I'M SCARED... WHAT IF THE VIDEO SHOWS ME PUTTING ON A PARKA AND GOING OUT?

OKAY. GOT IT.

THANKS.

KANAMI, STAY WITH ME.

I WILL.

I CAN STILL MAKE THE LAST TRAIN.

I HAVE A THING, SO I HAVE TO GET HOME.

TAKUYA... I'LL BE BACK TOMOR-ROW.

TAK TAK

TAK TAK TAK TAK

!

AAAA!

MURDER

AAAAAH!

THRNK

EEEEE!

THRNK

NOOOO!

THK

THKNK

SHRK

KRK

AAAAH!

GASP

KANAMI!

...THE CRADLE WILL FALL.

WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS ...

AND DOWN WILL COME BABY, CRADLE AND ALL.

RECEPTION

HER INJURIES ARE SERIOUS, BUT NOT FATAL.

WHAT'S THE VICTIM'S CONDITION?

SETAGAYA HARA HOSPITAL

SETAGAYA HARA

WHAT?! WHO IS IT?!

SHE SAID SHE KNEW HIM.

YES.

DID SHE SAY ANYTHING ABOUT HER ATTACKER?

THE ATTACKER WAS LIKELY BLINDED BECAUSE SHE USED HER PEPPER SPRAY WHEN HE ATTACKED, SO HE DIDN'T HIT ANY ORGANS.

REALLY? GOT IT!

A MAN WHO LIVES ON THE FIRST FLOOR OF HER BOYFRIEND'S APARTMENT BUILDING.

C'MON! HURRY IT UP!

SHE'D SEEN HIM BEFORE, AND THE WAY HE LOOKED MADE AN IMPRESSION ON HER.

A SELF-PROCLAIMED THERAPIST, RYOJI GOBARA, AGE 35.

A SUSPECT HAS BEEN ARRESTED FOR THE STRING OF MURDERS THAT HAS ROCKED THE NATION.

MOREOVER, JOURNALS ALLUDING TO THE CRIMES WERE DISCOVERED...

...AND THE POLICE ARE EXAMINING THESE AS EVIDENCE.

IN ADDITION TO THE TRACES OF BLOOD IN THE BATHROOM OF HIS APARTMENT...

...BLOOD-STAINED CLOTHING THOUGHT TO BELONG TO THE VICTIMS WAS FOUND IN THE CLOSET.

I've held out all this time, but I'm getting antsy. I'm thinking it's about time to start again.♡ Gotta find a new confidant. :)

Sept. 17
I guess my confidant Tomo-Yano was executed. Such a shock. :o Tomo took in my joy and my sadness... Thank you for saving me.

25th.
Waking up is the worst when I kill people! I'll share it with someone else. :P It's nice to share! S·H·A·R·E! I'll split my troubles with someone else! I found someone whose sensibilities are like mine. I'm sure he can help.

February
I did it again tonight. Killing people feels so good. :D But ~~a little~~ a lot of regret after the killing... :(

Today, I made the biggest mistake of my life!! I mean, forgetting to lock the door! :o And of all things, he mistakes my place for his and comes right in?! All those parkas I bought, he trashed.

The instant you wake up is your most defenseless moment. It's easy to invade your memory. I'm a genius at all kinds of things. The trick is to become him completely. :) I set our apartments up exactly the same way.

...WAS GOBARA HIMSELF REFLECTED IN A WINDOW.

THINKING ABOUT IT NOW, THE MAN I SAW OVER THE FENCE DURING THE THIRD MURDER...

A MAN WHO COULD DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT... WHO IS THIS GOBARA?

APPARENTLY, THE MURDER MEMORIES WERE PUSHED INTO MY BRAIN BY RYOJI GOBARA.

BUT THE TERROR'S NOT ENDING ANYTIME SOON.

I GAVE UP ON THE BAR EXAM AND WENT BACK TO MY PARENTS' HOUSE.

HOW MANY YEARS HAS IT BEEN SINCE THEN? RYOJI GOBARA WAS SENTENCED TO DEATH AND IS NOW IMPRISONED AT THE TOKYO DETENTION HOUSE.

...AFTER I WAKE FROM MY SLUMBER IN THE MORNING, HIS MEMORIES POUR IN.

BECAUSE EVEN NOW...

SHK

SHK

SKRTCH

SKRTCH

I AM...

...TAKUYA TERADA.

SHK SHK SHK SHK

I AM...

...TAKUYA TERADA.

CRACK

BE STILL...

SLEEP.

WHAP

SLEEP.

HAAH.

GASP

HAAH.

THUD

TAK
TAK
TAK
TAK
KNEE
KNEE
LET'S GO.
NO. 957. GOBARA.
ANY LAST WORDS?
...I AM TAKUYA TERADA.
PLEASE SIT DOWN.
I'M GOING TO BLIND-FOLD YOU NOW.

AND DOWN WILL COME BABY...

THNK

THNK

...CRADLE AND ALL.

THNK

KRRR

KRAK

KRAK

KRAK

KRAK

KRAK

KRAK

KRAK

KRAK

A WHOLE LIFE'S WORTH OF MEMO-RIES!

THEY SAY THAT A PERSON'S LIFE FLASHES BEFORE THEIR EYES AT THE TIME OF DEATH.

...CAME AN AVA-LANCHE! RYOJI GOBA. RA'S ENTIRE LIFE!

IN THE NEXT INSTANT, INTO MY BRAIN ...

TEN YEARS, *HM?* I WAS SURPRISED TO HEAR FROM YOU OUT OF THE BLUE.

IT'S ME. KANAMI.

THAT'S YOU, ISN'T IT?

TAKUYA?

TAKUYA, HOW ABOUT YOU?

I HAVE SCARS ALL OVER MY BODY. BUT THE MENTAL SCARS HAVE MOSTLY HEALED.

AND IT'S NO WONDER. YOU WERE STUCK WITH THE MEMORY OF TRYING TO KILL ME.

YOU WERE AFRAID TO SEE ME AFTER THE ATTACK.

EVEN THOUGH YOU WERE A VICTIM, TOO.

THE SPINE POPPING AWAY FROM THE SKULL.

BLIND-FOLDED, ROPE BITING INTO MY NECK.

I'M TOTALLY OVER IT NOW, TOO. BUT IT WAS HARD. THAT MORNING.

THE SKIN ON HIS NECK PULLING AWAY...

...I GOT TO SHARE THE PAIN OF MY CONFIDANT, SO IT WAS OKAY.

BUT...

KANAMI.

SLUMBER/END

AFTERWORD

COVID-19 has been running rampant globally and shows no signs of slowing down now, at the beginning of 2021. I feel like I spent most of my time during this coronavirus storm locked up in my studio drawing *The Liminal Zone*.

The Liminal Zone is a collection of short stories serialized on the LINE manga app.

This was the first time I've been serialized on a manga app, and I was so excited by how different it was from serialization in a magazine. There were no strict page limits. In a magazine, you have to make sure you draw the specified number of pages. For a long-form series, this isn't too much of an issue, but for a one-shot—if, for instance, you have thirty-two pages—you must finish the story in those thirty-two pages. A professional manga artist can neatly pack their story into the set number of pages, but for some reason, I'm not very good at this. When I draw storyboards—the blueprint for the manga—I generally go over the page limit. Then I have to whittle away the excess to fit it in, but when I still can't get it down to size even after that, I will go so far as to change the ending. It's embarrassing—or rather, it's unbecoming of a professional.

But with this series, I had the flexibility to increase the number of pages, and I happily went over the page limit to draw exactly what I wanted. I won't be able to judge whether or not that's good for the work itself, though, until a little time has passed and I go back over the stories. While I was doing the revisions for "Weeping Woman Way," I started to wonder if it wasn't a bit too long.

Still, perhaps I'm tired after drawing manga for years on end. I'm out of good ideas. The stories in this book were created drawing on ideas that I'd left unused in an old notebook of possible topics.

I drew "Weeping Woman Way" with the (Japanese ballad) *enka*-style topic of "a woman who cries too much and gutters form on her cheeks where the tears roll down. Those gutters are called sobbing roads." I didn't really make much use of that keyword "sobbing roads," though. (Incidentally, the sobbing road was inspired by Fujiko A. Fujio's "manga road.")

The entire foundation for "Madonna" was the silly idea of "write characters for 'angry witch woman,' read it as 'Madonna.'" Below that in my notebook, there is a scribble added of unclear meaning "witch husband (madanna—a play on "danna," the word for husband and Madonna)" and that was the end of it.

With "The Spirit Flow of Aokigahara," I originally was going to make it a story of the evolution of the bodies of a new species of humanity into a streamlined shape. The idea was "eventually, humanity evolves to avoid a powerful solar wind or something that assaults the Earth with streamlined bodies." But I dismissed it as being too absurdly science fiction, and once the supernatural element was added in, it became a deeply bizarre story.

"Slumber" is an idea I asked to wake up after I let it sleep for a very long time. (So only the idea gets to sleep. Of course.) "The moment you wake up in the morning, you forget all of the unpleasant things of everyday life and are immersed in a feeling a pure bliss, but memories of harsh reality quickly come back to you"—I think a lot of people have likely experienced this moment, and I decided to make a horror story about it, but I couldn't quite pull it together into a narrative.

And so *The Liminal Zone* ended up being a collection of four longish stories.

I'd like to take the opportunity here to express my gratitude to LINE Manga for giving me a new challenge in drawing these works, my editor Makiko Hara and everyone in the Asahi Shimbun Publications comic editorial division for helping me craft these stories, the designer Kazuhiro Fukami for yet another wonderful cover, and everyone else involved in the production of the book.

—JUNJI ITO
January 26, 2021

THE LIMINAL ZONE

STORY & ART BY JUNJI ITO

Translation & Adaptation: **Jocelyne Allen**
Touch-Up Art & Lettering: **Eric Erbes**
Cover & Graphic Design: **Adam Grano**
Editor: **Masumi Washington**

The Liminal Zone
© JI Inc. 2021
Originally published in Japan in 2021 by Asahi Shimbun Publications Inc., Tokyo. English translation rights arranged with Asahi Shimbun Publications Inc., Tokyo through TOHAN CORPORATION, Tokyo.

The stories, characters, and incidents mentioned in this publication are entirely fictional.

No portion of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the copyright holders.

Printed in the U.S.A.

Published by VIZ Media, LLC
P.O. Box 77010
San Francisco, CA 94107

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
First printing, July 2022

PARENTAL ADVISORY
THE LIMINAL ZONE is rated T+ for Older Teen and is recommended for ages 16 and up. This volume contains graphic violence and horror themes.

VIZ MEDIA
viz.com

VIZ SIGNATURE
vizsignature.com